SENSE PERCEPTION AND THE EARLY MODERN SOCIAL WORLD

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I analyze representations of the intersections between sense perception and sociality in early modern English literature. Literary texts from the late sixteenth through mid-seventeenth centuries illustrate the diverse modes through which early modern writers engage the complexly interrelated categories of sense perception and social life. Building on early modern scholarship's increasing investment in the senses, my project shows the period's interest in the limits of sense perception through depictions of extreme sensory overstimulation and deprivation. I show that Marlowe, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton represent individuals' sensory perceptions as enabling or threatening their relationship to the broader social world. These representations reveal the phenomenological ties between ideas of community and isolation and the functions and capabilities of the senses. I argue that, in early modern literature, encounters with sensory excess and deprivation manifest as larger social catalysts, propelling individual acts of social retreat, action, or implosion which, in turn, alter the wider social landscape.

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For my grandmothers, Jiamo Xie and Helen Johnson

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I:

INTRODUCTION: SENSORY EXTREMES AND SOCIAL LIMITS

Our megalopoli are deafening: who would put up with this hellish din if we didn't simply expect that with a group comes a racket. Being part of one means not hearing it. The better integrated you are, the less you notice it; the more you suffer from it, the less well-integrated you are… Noise is what defines the social.[1]

—Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*

In Ben Jonson's play *Epicoene, or, The Silent Woman* (1609), the audience is introduced to Morose, an aptly-named melancholic character who "can endure no noise."[2] Although he tellingly has no aversion to his own voice, Morose is loath to hear any sounds he does not himself produce. Morose, we learn, "hath chosen a street to lie in so narrow at both ends, that it will receive no coaches, nor carts, nor any of these common noises" (166-168). This sonically isolated location reflects Morose's extreme aversion to noise, which is only one of the many uncommon and eccentric measures he takes to keep out possible "intruders" who might sully his otherwise tranquil soundscape. Morose's decision to live on a street so narrow that it bars entrance of common vehicles serves as a satirical depiction of social stimuli as activating and necessitating individual

[1] From Serres, Michel, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Continuum, 2009) 107.

[2] All quotations and line numbers for *Epicoene* taken from Ben Jonson, *Epicene: or The Silent Woman*, ed. Richard Dutton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). Morose's name is apt because, according to early modern medical belief, having an excess of black melancholic humors in the body would result in a miserable and discontent character. Gail Kern Paster details contrasting states that illustrate this effect: "Clear judgment and prudent action required the free flow of clear fluids in the brain, but melancholy or choler altered and darkened them" (*Humoring the Body*, 13).

acts of self-enclosure, and, conversely, how individuals' extreme reactions to stimuli can alter and shape the wider social landscape around them. For example, Morose allegedly wears a "huge turban of night-caps on his head, buckled over his ears" (141-142). The layered helmet of night-caps signals not only a fear of the proximity and intensity of surrounding sounds, but also denotes its wearer's need for an accommodation in order to coexist with others who lead normal social lives.

Morose's helmet forms a makeshift shield against inexorable excesses of hearing. As the introductory epitaph from Michel Serres reminds us, sound is the one specific modality of sense perception perhaps most closely associated with large crowds and gatherings. Serres suggests that to be an individual who is socially integrated as part of a group "means not hearing" the noise while being among that group. *Epicoene*'s Morose illustrates the state of suffering from noise and therefore a lack of social integration. His inability to withstand the noise of crowds exemplifies one way in which early modern English individuals could find sensory stimulation by other people so deeply intolerable that it inhibits their ability to live in the city and participate in social life as citizens. Morose's requisite soundproofing attire and his choice of residential location illustrate a profound need for self-enclosure, manifesting in his case as the strategic avoidance of overstimulating sounds and social landscapes.[3] Jonson's play serves as a potent example from early modern literature in which an individual character's experience of overstimulating information is framed as justifying social withdrawal.

[3] I use the term "self-enclosure" in this study to designate an individual's need and personal choice to surround themselves with specific perceptual objects and levels of stimulation that correspond to their level of desire for social involvement and interactions.

In this dissertation, I examine the relationship between extreme sensory states and the degrees of social agency that they enable or impede in early modern English literature. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama and poetry offer striking depictions of such encounters with sensory extremes, illustrated as states of confounding social overload or social disappointment. In these depictions, characters and speakers are shown as overwhelmed by the awful sounds, smells, or other stimuli produced by others or else isolated and frustrated due to deprivation of one or another sense that normatively functions as a channel for communication or social integration.

This study seeks to bridge a gap between early modern scholarship that examines the social and political role of the individual in 16th- and 17th-century English society and more recent criticism that traces representations of individuals' fluid embodied categories of identity, such as affect, lived experience, illness, and disability. My exploration of these intersections between social agency and states of overstimulation or deprivation centers on representations that frame sensory excess and lack as signs of individual identity and particularity, as fraught channels through which to reach God, and as emblems of national and religious belonging (or of exile). Each of these three categories illuminates the connections between individual negotiations with the world and social relationships that suffer or benefit from a lack of adjustment to the world.

I argue that, in early modern literature, encounters with sensory excess and deprivation manifest as larger social catalysts, propelling individual acts of social retreat, action, or implosion which, in turn, alter the wider social landscape. As in Morose's case, sensory distress is often framed as a specific affect prompted either by excess or lack of stimuli originating from social situations and gatherings. Closing themselves off to

overwhelming or unsettlingly absent stimuli both asserts individuals' empowerment and also functions as a safeguard that protects their capacity for future action within the social realm. Action in the realm of human experience does not take place within a vacuum, but rather always within a larger network of social exchanges, connections, and ruptures. My understanding of the realm of the social follows Hannah Arendt's outline of the rise of the notion of society itself: "Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public" (46). My definition of social agency is, above all else, the ability for individuals to take action: that is, to navigate the wider social context around them; to advocate for themselves and others; to claim and defend their respective identities and beliefs; to make their own decisions; and to achieve their desired goals while living as an integrated member of a broader community.

As illustrated by Morose's peculiar residential preferences, encounters with extreme and distressing stimuli often forces individuals out of the community at large, or else prevent successful integration in the first place. While Morose's wealth makes his preferences for an asocial location and quiet lifestyle feasible, this flexibility was not a reality for most early modern English people. In cities, particularly the metropolis of London, people typically lacked the household and living arrangements that would enable them to regularly and fully distance themselves from others. For instance, householders and servants shared beds, and children typically slept in trundle beds directly next to their parents' beds. Meanwhile, socially- and sensory-deprived folk often lacked the resources

and transportation to seek out larger groups of people and events.[4] The frequency and significance of inaccessibility and extreme barriers to social involvement as companions to overstimulation and deprivation in literature suggest the relevance of examples from early modern texts that focus on representations of extreme and distressing stimuli, as well as the ensuing feelings of isolation. Isolation may be involuntary or it may be intentional, like Morose's. Within isolation inheres not only the potential for social exile, but also for agency positively conceived.

I. Dissatisfaction, power, and agency

Examining the connection between sense perception and agency in social contexts reveals the ways that the senses clue us in to larger operations of social cultures and institutions, and that sensory barriers further prevent social agency and integration for people who are already marginalized in early modern England, due to their bodily or cognitive difference. This dissertation's analysis centers on the various ways in which socio-perceptual situations present themselves to individuals, on the affects they prompt in individuals who find them too much or too little (or just too plain distressing), and on the social implications of these affective responses. In encounters with both excess and voids of stimulation, the unifying element is the dissatisfaction an individual feels with the situation at hand. "Too much or too little" may apply to the felt degree of social imbrication that accompanies certain stimuli as well as to the level of stimulation itself.

[4] For more discussion of social and material life in early modern England, see Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Patricia Fumerton, *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Lena Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

As Rei Terada's work on phenomenophilia (her term for obsession with debates about appearance and reality) and dissatisfaction reminds us:

> The dissatisfaction one finds around phenomenophilia is attenuated, diffuse, and reflexive. One can suffer or just be uncomfortable, without minding it (one can even enjoy it); dissatisfaction is *minding*. Dissatisfaction is discomfort—probably suffering as well, felt with apologetic understatement as discomfort—accompanied by the comment that it ought not to be.[5]

Social and sensory extremes both trigger the feeling of "minding" Terada describes as inherent to affectively "loaded" encounters with objects. Discomfort with one's current social positioning and the concomitant sensory environment motivates desires to change and regulate the environment, and thereby to balance one's relationship to their community as well. A state of balance, by definition neither overwhelming or underwhelming, entails a degree of social integration that matches that individual's desires to connect (or not connect) with other people and the stimuli that comes with them.

Individuals experiencing uncomfortable stimuli levels may find that reorienting themselves to (or removing themselves from) a dissatisfying sensory environment is more necessary than social expectations that they simply tolerate stimulus overload or deprivation. Terada challenges conventionally held notions that participating in social life and enduring the given world are the "correct" or "healthy" things to do in all cases, irrespective of physiological and psychological consequences for the individual.

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[5] Terada, Rei. *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 23-24.

Questioning the characterization of "looking away" as an act of "transgression," Terada asserts that interrogating the resistibility of

> the most compelling givens…seems to miss the point… Further, the idea that the recession or even 'refusal' of the phenomenophile is transgressive in the first place adopts a slightly paranoid point of view, in which simply declining to participate is society's fantasy of an insult to itself.[6]

The presence of a fantasy around compulsory social participation raises the question of who exactly is engaging in and sustaining such an expectation. On the surface, a person may seem to decline to participate in displeasing social interactions because of a "quirk" in distaste or reaction to the concomitant stimulation that comes with such interactions. However, upon closer examination, seemingly extreme or unfounded reactions can reveal the hierarchies and power structures that make stimulation levels difficult for individuals within a shared social space. Like individual processes of perception, the forces that drive reactions by overstimulated or deprived people are often personal, subjective, and sometimes "invisible." For instance, people (now and in premodern periods) may struggle with social integration due to differing or marginalized identities, cultural and religious differences, mental and physical disabilities or illnesses, trauma, and/or because of any other host of factors, visible or not. In terms of the obstacles created for early modern life, extreme states of stimulation signified by turns an individual's spiritual and moral state, inner levels of temperance and self-regulation, or fundamental bodily difference.

[6] Terada, *Looking Away*, 32.

II. Sensation in early modern contexts

For early moderns, the senses generally served as ripe material for theological and allegorical interpretation. Post-Reformation English culture generally held that the senses were portals to sinful indulgence. Sensory excess was figured as a state to avoid if one wished to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. Horrific sights, sounds, odors, and other punishments that targeted one's sensory faculties (such as being blinded) to be a punishment for past sinful acts.[7] In his *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), which stages a dialogue about "Notable Vices and Imperfections" currently rampant in "Aligna" (an anagram for Anglia, another name for England) the writer Philip Stubbes denounces the "certain sweete Pride" implied by the widespread fashion of carrying and indulging in

> cyuet, muske, swéete powders, fragrant Pomanders, odorous perfumes & such like, wherof the smel may be felt and perceiued…the Prophet Esaias telleth them, instead of their Pomaunders, musks ciuets, balmes, swéet odours and perfumes, they shall haue stench and horrour in the nethermost hel. Let them take héed to it and amend their wicked liues.[8]

Stubbes's image of sinner's aromatic delights transformed into "stench and horrour" at the threshold between their mortal life and the afterlife underlines the tendency of early modern religious culture to echo the popular "as above, so below" paradigm in a rather sinister way when judging objects that afford pleasure to the bodily senses.

Early moderns also believed that the senses could lead one into error simply due the ability to perceive, since the physical world was assumed to be filled with false

[7] For more on early modern understandings of sin and religious punishment, see Gregory, Brad S. *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[8] Stubbes, Philip. *The Anatomie of Abuses*. London: John Kingston for Richard Jones, 1583, *Early English Books Online*, unnumbered page.

appearances. As we will see in the chapter on *Samson Agonistes*, Dalila the Philistine's sensual distractions cause Samson to be captured by his enemies and to lose his eyes. Satan was also believed to be a master shapeshifter who could present himself in the image of an Angel of Light. Not unrelated to this fear, antitheatrical writings about early modern theater railed against the immoral use of false appearances associated with actors in costume onstage. Stephen Gosson warns readers that popular plays are "consecrated to idolatrie, they are not of God [;] if they proceede not from God, they are the doctrine and inventions of the devil."[9] Secularity mixed with the elements of false pretense and illusion becomes morally and spiritually fatal because the result successfully entices so many audience members to share in theatrical spectacle.

According to post-Reformation thought, if there is a wondrous sight to behold or information to glean, the fallen condition of humankind impels us to seek it out, often to our detriment. In *The vanitie of the eie* (1615), writer George Hakewill laments the inability of God's design of humans' optical faculties to prevent us from sticking our eyeballs where they ought not go: "such is the condition of most men, that although nature haue seated the eie in the inner chamber of the face, yet are they prying alwaies into other mens busines; sharp sighted as Eagles in censuring other mens actions, but bats, & moles in their own" (27-28). In this paradigm, people become excessively enmeshed in the affairs of others, not only because they can perceive (literally see) others as having interesting or distressing lives, but also because this external view into another's life relieves them of having to spend too much time perceiving and reflecting upon their *own* behaviors and problems, thereby removing social pressures from

[9] Stephen Gosson, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) in Kinney, *Markets of Bawdrie: The Dramatic Criticism of Stephen Gosso*n (New York: Hollowbrook, 1974), 151.

themselves and creating the state of vanity referred to in the text's title. Hakewill's remark clues us into one way in which early modern discourse on the senses views a logical progression from the function of the senses to social consequences.

Early modern discourse tends to reveal the inherent sociality of the five senses by ascribing sentient and cognitive qualities to the individual senses themselves. This tendency can be illustrated by Thomas Tomkis's 1607 academic drama about the social sensorium, titled *Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority.*[10] In *Lingua*, the central allegorical premise involves a competition between Lingua the tongue, figured as a woman, and the five bodily senses (Visus, Tacitus, Olfactus, Auditus, and Gustus), each represented as male. Lingua seeks to prove that the tongue, while not a sense, is a faculty demonstrates the period's notions that the senses are social in their interactions with one another within an individual, and shows that these internal interactions affect individuals' social contacts and outcomes in the real world. Moreover, *Lingua* experiments with ideas that the senses and other bodily faculties can each have their own distinct agenda within a single body. Tomkis's exploration of sense perception as allegory in *Lingua* helps us connect early modern representations of group dynamics to widely accepted notions of sensation.

III. Approaches to historical perceptions

Early modern texts that explore the matter of sensation help us theorize possibilities for understanding perception in the past because they serve as distinct examples of their authors' understandings and articulations of individual perceptions. For instance,

[10] Tomkis, Thomas. *Lingua: or, The combat of the tongue, and the five senses for superiority, a pleasant comoedy.* London: Printed for Simon Miller, 1657.

Tomkis's treatment of the senses in *Lingua* allows scholars to theorize the pertinence of fictional representation as a way to gain insight into the historically situated perceptions of others, and to answer questions of whether the human body has "adapted and developed new modes of perception or merely new theories about them."[11] As sensorium scholar Holly Dugan has suggested, the senses are "mired in misconceptions about biology, cognition, and representation."[12] Highlighting the many discrepancies between definitions and theories of sense across history—such as claims that there are five, six, or nine senses, Dugan argues that cultural shifts cannot be relied on to fully explain understandings of perception.[13] Historians also must pay attention to biological shifts, which can be charted through examination of the ways individual bodies perceive the world. The study of processes of perception is best served by a methodology that already treats embodied experience as a source of knowledge about oneself, others, and the world. Historical phenomenology's emphasis on the material body, its anatomy, and its natural processes can help us uncover the significance of distressing encounters with perceptual objects and others as a form of social phenomena that extends beyond the individual sensing body. To this end, I propose a historical phenomenology of social and bodily difference as these categories of difference relate to disability, affect, and other ways of reading stimulation extremes. This framework helps to specify the relationship between extreme sensory overstimulation and individual affect, as this dissertation's chapter on smell in Shakespeare and Marlowe will show. For its part, the category of disability comes to bear on social relations in the chapter on Milton's *Samson Agonistes*:

[11] Holly Dugan, "Shakespeare and the Senses," *Literature Compass* 6, no. 3 (2009): 726-40, 727.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Aristotle had first defined a theory of five human senses, to which Augustine added a sixth, and "contemporary scientific discourse now recognizes nine" senses (727).

a focus on Samson's blindness both as a particular perceptual experience *and* as disability allows for a sociological analysis of the gaze as it is experienced by Samson while captive and blind (i.e., unable to gaze back).

Phenomenological analysis offers a useful emphasis on the material body and first-person experience as points of reference through which the visceral and sensible aspects of the need for social belonging bear down upon us. It also helps to highlight the ways that the achievement of a desired level of social integration generally eludes certain individuals and groups. The term "historical phenomenology," coined by Bruce R. Smith in 2000, provides a model for thinking about this dissertation's approach to early modern sensation and extreme sensory states. As Smith points out, the faculties of perception possess their own history, and this history is one that is culturally bound to a time and place. However, unlike texts and other cultural artifacts, sense perception denotes a range of material processes that are also bound to the body, and that must be uncovered and documented with the knowledge that our own understanding of sensory experience always hinges in part on our own bodily self-understanding. Between the scholar's own perceiving body which they can never elude, and the experience of others (fictional or not), stretches a chasm of unknowable territory shaped by others' social and material environments, which are now out of reach of the scholar's own body and ability to experience. The language of phenomenology provides room for analysis within this gap of the knowable and sensible, while helping us resist tendencies to objectify the matter of sensation. Objectification of perception separates the experience of stimuli from the individual who is experiencing it, which results in analysis of the act of sensation that is "disembodied" and disconnected from the individual's material aspects of identity.

IV. The body in early modern criticism

My analysis builds upon previously established critical approaches to embodiment, cognition, and feeling. These approaches date back to early modern literary studies' "turn to the body," which has since been followed by new approaches to embodiment, affect, and disability. Early modern historians in the 1990s, such as Carla Mazzio, David Hillman, Gail Kern Paster, Michael Schoenfeldt, and Jonathan Sawday, broke new ground by examining the period's representations of the corporeal self and its materiality.[14] Around the turn of the millennium, studies on the early modern body shifted to consider its material processes, with works by Gail Kern Paster, Michael Schoenfeldt, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson that examined emotion, embodiment, and flow between the inside and outside of the body within the classically-derived Galenic paradigm.[15] The benefit of examining period belief in humoral processes as a model of embodiment comes in part from the period's tendency to literalize emotion through both literal and fictional representation of one or more "passions" or bodily humors as excessive or lacking. The state of being "out of balance" is almost axiomatically negative in early modern English culture, which championed temperance and moderation medically as well as in its ethics of self-care and self-discipline.

[14] See Hillman, David, and Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Paster, Gail Kern, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Schoenfeldt, Michael, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Sawday, Jonathan, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[15] See Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*; Paster, Gail Kern, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004); and Paster, Gail Kern, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Analysis of individual bodies' capabilities, disabilities, and emotional reactions helps to connect factors of power and identity to individuals' sensory encounters with other people. Within the last 15 years, literary and cultural historians have begun to view the senses, affect, and other forms of bodily cognition as important factors within larger systems of signification and discourses about the ways these faculties help us apprehend the world.[16] Literary and cultural theory's "affective turn" has helped to shift understandings of emotions as intelligent and socially consequential signs of lived experience, rather than as simply subjective forces. Most recently, following work in medieval studies, early modern critics' explorations of the body have recognized the social consequences of notions of embodied difference as they relate to the category of disability. Elizabeth Bearden's *Monstrous Kinds* positions the construction of monstrosity as a useful model for understanding the social and lived impacts of disability in early modern England.[17] Allison Hobgood and David H. Wood's edited collection, *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England,* pursues "a more ethical beholding" of early modern and contemporary disabled persons, and calls on readers to reflect on their own relationships to disability, both now and in the Renaissance.[18] Both works' methodologies exemplify the value of embodied processes of perception and cognition, both as subjects for representational study and as channels through which to access a

[16] See Smith, Bruce R., *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Gallagher, Lowell, and Shankar Raman, eds., *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment, and Cognition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Harvey, Elizabeth, Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Howes, David, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Smith, Simon, Jackie Watson, and Amy Kenny, eds., *The Senses in Early Modern England,1558-1660* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).
[17] Bearden, Elizabeth, *Monstrous Kinds: Body, Space, and Narrative in Renaissance Representations of Disability* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2019).
[18] Hobgood, Allison P., and David Houston Wood, eds., *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

sharper image of embodied experiences of sensory experience in the past. My dissertation's method draws on disability studies and its concentration on non-normativity as a factor that influences individuals' social agency, both prior to and following confrontations with extreme or upsetting stimuli. This project's work overlaps with that of disability studies in the sense that both are invested in validating experiences that differ from and disrupt ways of navigating and responding to the world that are constructed as "normal" on a social level.

V. Clarification of key terms

As disability studies' focus on categories of power and bodily difference show, the extreme sensory events that trigger individuals' distress or acts of self-enclosure also circumscribe bodies within larger social fluctuations and impact individuals' access to social integration and community. The free flow or absence of stimuli within a social context galvanizes individuals to seek out other people (or solitude) in order to regulate their ability to participate socially given internal reactions to and experiences of stimuli. This self-regulation consists of monitoring the intensity of one's affective response as a sign of one's personal sensory thresholds, as well as setting boundaries to mitigate the physical presence or absence of stimuli itself. To achieve a balanced state, an individual would ostensibly steer away from external stimuli that upsets them or threatens to invade their body. I suggest that social agency also presents us with a spectrum that contains positive agency at one end and complete disempowerment at the other. In my chapter case studies, general experiences of overstimulation and deprivation also intersect with factors such as social power, culture, and individual identity (including minority status,

belief systems, and disability), as well as an individual's personal needs and goals. The positive side of the spectrum of social agency can involve active disruptions of (or challenges to) existing social structures and hierarchies, or even just a profound sense of belonging and thriving within a social environment. Conversely, the negative end of the social agency spectrum could manifest as general distress, an inability to act in order to extract oneself from a socially upsetting circumstance, or a lapse or breakdown of the faculty of clear thinking. Whether or not a given individual will find their ability to act and participate in social life impacted by stimulation levels depends upon that individual's threshold for stimulation, the extent to which they are socially integrated prior to the extreme stimulus, and their ability to regulate or accept internal reactions to the outside world.

In my analysis, I refer to the extremes of sensory experience as "overstimulation" and "deprivation." Unlike *Epicoene*'s Morose, who is overstimulated by social noise, subjects who are uncomfortably "deprived" typically have not sought out a deprived state (such as a sensory deprivation tank or chamber). Rather, the void or inadequacy of stimuli exists for these individuals because of emotional and physical violence or estrangement (both are, in a sense, a transgression of social boundaries swinging to extremes instead of maintaining a civil yet sociable distance). In my chapter on *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta*, both Shylock and Barabas choose extreme acts of distancing and self-enclosure to preserve bodily boundaries between themselves and Christians, which translates into intentional social separation. Typically, an absence of stimulation is characterized by a longing and a movement *towards* others and the sensory world, in the same way that an excess of stimulation is characterized by

suffocation, overload, and a distinct need to turn away from the very same things. The long-term consequences of overload and deprivation on individuals vary significantly, especially when comparing effects of overstimulation to those of deprivation. As we will see in the chapter case studies, repeated or intentional overload, especially by the same people or groups of people, may transform certain kinds of social contact into a source of trauma for overstimulated individuals. Inversely, a habitual lack of stimuli (whether caused by isolation or physical incapacitation) can similarly tarnish an individual's ability to connect with others or maintain a normal level of social functioning.

VI. Chapter contents

In my first chapter, "'Gentilicious…unto the Jews': Olfaction and Disgust in *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice*," I investigate the challenge of navigating social spaces that contain perceptual objects that invade one's body due to the bodily practices of other people and consider the ways that differing ethnic and religious identities can affect these sensory encounters. *The Jew of Malta*'s Barabas and *The Merchant of Venice*'s Shylock are represented as particularly sensitive specifically to the smells of Christian characters, resulting both from properties they describe as physically inherent and from specific social spaces and rituals (such as sharing a meal). Both Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Shylock confront the problem of overstimulation by viewing it as an opportunity to retreat from social spaces whose stimuli (sights, sounds, and smells) are dictated by the religious and cultural majority group. Focusing on the importance of regulating the entrance of specific kinds of smells for maintaining one's own bodily constitution, I argue that these overstimulating Christian spaces offer

Jewish characters the opportunity to reclaim the rhetorics of smell and disgust (i.e., the *foetor judaicus* myth) that had previously been used to mark and disempower Jewish people in discourses of race in medieval and early modern Europe. In doing so, both plays figure historically oppressed subjects as able to express dissent and reject the larger social structures that seek to keep them hemmed in for the benefit of the majority. Additionally, both plays illuminate the power of individual particularity as one way for people to cite their bodily needs as more urgent priorities than social conventions or collective preferences. As this chapter demonstrates, extenuating sensory circumstances can serve for some individuals as an impetus to exercising agency, such as asserting their needs or establishing a necessary boundary.

The same circumstances, however, could be paralyzing for a different individual who lacks a baseline or prior degree of social integration, or who is unable to communicate and advocate for themselves while in an overstimulated or deprived state. In the dissertation's second chapter, "Herbert, Hearing, and the Sociality of Devotion," I examine the poetry of George Herbert's *The Temple* (1633), its occasional preoccupation with the perceived absence of God, and the concomitant lack of desired auditory input—God's voice—for the devotional speaker. I also consider the social and perceptual exigencies of engaging in the act of devotion, especially within the constricted space of the early modern devotional closet. Herbert laments the unwelcoming stance of God's "silent ears," which allegorize divine unwillingness to receive and grant the devotional subject's supplications. This lack of sensory input, the absence of God's presence and witness of the devotional act, eventually leads to complete psychological and material breakdown for the poems' speakers. The significant "other" in this social relationship is

God, and the individual's social concerns and atmosphere are mostly constrained to this specific relationship, within the time and space of the devotional closet. Proximity and "social space" are defined in these poems as an auditory channel, through which one seeks out divine grace, and (ostensibly), has their prayers heard and answered by God. The consequences of social and sensory deprivation are felt in this case as spiritual deprivation and psychological distress at God's unavailability.

Following exploration of the exigencies of deprivation and devotional estrangement, the final chapter, "Ocular Dispossession and the Sociality of Shame in *Samson Agonistes*," moves to consider the ways extreme deprivation (in this case, being permanently blinded), brings social-sensory discourse back to the public, larger world of religious and national belonging in Milton's late closet tragedy *Samson Agonistes*. Interrogating the relationship between interior sensation and external social imperatives to take action and participate in the world of other people, I demonstrate that Samson's captivity is represented as especially torturous because it catalyzes deeper meditation on the existential and spiritual ramifications of his blindness, as well as reflections on his own sense of belonging, which is permanently altered due to dispossession of his sense of sight. As a bodily condition, blindness also impels Samson to question the divine impulse behind the precarity and vulnerability of humans' eyes, as well as to imagine alternative models and possibilities for the ability of eyesight, which seem both to captivate him and offer a momentary distraction from his overwhelming feelings of shame. Shame originates not only from Samson's physical state of being shackled and forced to labor, but also from memories of his former weakness in the presence of Dalila the Philistine and her world of sensual excess. Samson suffers a lack of social agency due to this shame

(which, I stress, is an intensely social affect). Shame, in turn, further objectifies Samson's suffering as a blind prisoner and disavowed Nazirite, because he himself is unable to see the gaze that others project onto him. For Samson and the other individuals represented in my chapters' case studies, discomfort associated with sensory ability propels challenges to and shifts within the wider social structure, which includes religious, national, and political communities.

II:

"GENTILICIOUS…UNTO THE JEWS": OLFACTION AND DISGUST IN *THE JEW OF MALTA* AND *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

At the beginning of Act 4 of Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (performed c. 1589-91), as the titular Jewish character Barabas and his Muslim slave Ithamore take a break from the hard work of poisoning nuns, they mock two approaching friars by calling them disgusting. Ithamore recognizes the friars on sight: "Look, look, master; here come two religious caterpillars" (4.1.22).[19] Barabas, however, claims to sense the friars by their smell, not their appearance: "I smelt 'em ere they came" (4.1.23). While the friars' ungainly bodies prompt for Ithamore a kind of moral disgust—his label "caterpillar" suggests economic and sexual parasitism—their strong smell disgusts Barabas in a far more visceral sense.[20] By suggesting the Christians stink, Barabas not only asserts his sensory judgment about their bodies but also isolates them as a collective group. Considering no other character in the play shares Barabas's apparent olfactory sensitivity, this scene reeks as a particularly salient illustration of the play's representation of the affective and sensory dimensions of encounters between Jews and Christians. Additionally, Barabas even claims he must "turn into the air to purge" himself after conversing with a Christian (2.3.47). In fact, Barabas is not the only Jewish character on

[19] Quotations and line numbers for *The Jew of Malta* from *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. Michael Cordner (Oxford University Press, 1995).

[20] In the early modern period, "caterpillar" denotes "a rapacious person; an extortioner; one who preys upon society," as well as the larvae of butterflies and moths (*OED*). Thomas Lupton refers to Cardinal Cusanus as "that caterpillar"; see Thomas Lupton, *The Christian against the Iesuite* (London, 1582), fol. 85(v). The anonymous character pamphlet "The Character of a Jesuit" refers to its titular figure as "a pernicious Caterpillar, that cannot be content to Feast his Sences with the Luscious Sweets of the Garden, but meanly and basely, must destroy the choicest Plants"; see Anon, "The Character of a Jesuit" (London, 1681).

the early modern stage who is disgusted by Christians' smells: in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), Shylock scorns Bassanio's dinner invitation in order to avoid "[smelling] pork," and he also metonymically connects pigs to Christians in the trial scene (1.3.30).[21] Both Barabas and Shylock assert olfaction and disgust as rhetorics of bodily experience that mark differences between Christians and Jewish people.

Both characters are represented as using olfaction and disgust, explained with references to Judaism, to project bodily collectivity onto Christians. Barabas and Shylock reclaim rhetorics of smell and disgust, thereby complicating notions that racialization must be fixed in pre-established hierarchies. Their disgust at Christian bodies and their odors subverts a view of Jewish/Gentile relations in which only Christians—the hegemonic religious group—are able to racially mark and alienate a marginalized group. Building on earlier critical insights about the prevalence of smell and disgust in the characterization of Jewish people during the early modern period, I approach these plays from a slightly different angle.[22] In *Malta* and *Merchant*, Jewish characters' claims of disgust dramatize bodily difference as dynamically embodied and sensed, highlighting the instability of notions of embodied Jewish/Gentile difference where the senses and affective judgments are involved.

In my exploration of Jewish characters' expressions of disgust, I consider a few of the ways that their interactions with and perceptions of odiferous Christian bodies signify

[21] Quotations and line numbers for *The Merchant of Venice* from *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010).

[22] For the prevalence of smell and disgust in characterization of Jews during the early modern period, see Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); David S. Katz, "Shylock's Gender: Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England," *Review of English Studies* 50, no. 200 (1999): 440-62, and Katz, *The Jews in the History of England* (Oxford University Press, 1994); and James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (Columbia University Press, 1996).

the transgression of religious and personal standards of purity. To begin, I show that *Malta* stages a peculiar religious "custom" of expelling bad air from conversations with a Christian, thereby recoding Barabas's disgust as a religiously authorized mode of social distancing. In *Merchant*, associations between Christians' bodies and the unclean food they consume manifest in claims of olfactory disgust and later shift to an equivocation between Christians and images of sensible objects coded as repulsive. I show that, in the case of Shylock, the mode of his disgust is represented variously: as religiously mandated avoidance of unclean dining choices and as his broader association of the extremes of his hatred for the Christian Antonio with swine, Judaism's unclean animal *par excellence*. Taking up these sensations and beliefs in *Malta* and *Merchant* as representations of self-reported experience, I use phenomenological analysis to demonstrate that Barabas's and Shylock's represented disgust for Christians is animated by individually embodied perceptions of the disgusting, which cannot be fully separated from their stated religious beliefs. I follow Sara Ahmed's notion of "orientations," defined as states of being directed toward (or away from) certain objects and others in the world, to show that Barabas and Shylock are represented as oriented to the disgusting in ways that are particular to their bodies.[23] My approach follows an increased engagement with the "phenomenological turn" in studies of race and embodiment. Discussions of race and oppression have sometimes elided the body to avoid objectification; however, as a result, these discussions have "done little to show how the body is the ground for agency more positively conceived."[24] Phenomenological analysis thus entails reading the body back

[23] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.
[24] Letitia Meynell, "Introduction to Embodiment and Agency," *Embodiment and Agency*, ed. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (State College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 9. For phenomenological perspectives on race and embodiment, see Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible*

into our examinations of race and difference, including those represented on the early modern stage.

Olfactory disgust towards a dominant cultural and religious group highlights my dissertation's larger argument about sensory extremes and social agency. Barabas's and Shylock's disgust exemplifies the state of overstimulation in the form of overexposure to stimuli (odors) that one finds intolerable, partially or mostly due to the particular cultural group from which they are perceived to emanate, granting to members of a religiously marginalized group a chance to consciously separate themselves from the social origin of overstimulation. As Constance Classen has pointed out, the particular smell or odor of another can serve as a scapegoat for antipathies one already holds toward that other.[25] In this chapter's case studies, antipathies about cultural and religious difference inevitably bleed into the realm of the social and vice versa, as represented by the perspectives and social positioning of Barabas and Shylock. Their anxieties around (and resistance to) social integration with Christians underscores the tendency of the early modern period to assume the porosity of the human body's boundaries, and, moreover, to recognize the presence of any strong smell as "a reminder of how the body was vulnerable to its environment and to unseen influences circulating within it."[26] As Holly Dugan has noted, the plague outbreaks of 1592 and 1603 ensured that "the sensory world of London…was ghastly."[27] Airborne odors, impossible to avoid within the city, "showed that there was

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Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self (Oxford University Press, 2005); Alcoff, "Toward a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment," *Radical Philosophy* 95 (1999): 15-26; and Emily S. Lee, ed., *Living Alterities*: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

[25] See Classen, Constance, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[26] Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 97.

[27] Ibid.

virtually no way to police such boundaries or, more importantly, to protect the porous body from infected zones" (98). Due to the inevitability of encountering sick odors around the time of the plague, early modern English people were culturally conditioned to anticipate strong and unfamiliar smells as potentially serious threats to health, and, when confronted with the smells of unfamiliar others, to feel one's own social positioning and moral and religious purity was corrupted by the communicable properties of those strange odors.

This chapter's case studies demonstrate both the socially consequential and arbitrary nature of ascribing odors onto another. The ascription of odors assigns certain olfactory codes that stand in for other forms of difference, power, and domination and have nothing at all to do with "inherently" different bodily properties of people within certain cultural, ethnic, or religious groups. Classen's anthropological work on smell and difference leads to the conclusion that "As a rule, the dominant group in a society ascribes to itself a pleasant or neutral smell" (102). Thus, the projection of olfactory codes automatically creates social hierarchies and subgroups that rank and exclude specific individuals according to bodily properties the dominant group frames as innate. In *Malta* and *Merchant*, Barabas and Shylock reject these olfactory religious and cultural presets for social belonging, and they do so by not only by ignoring these codes, but also by dramatically reversing the act of odor ascription back onto Christians, the dominant social and religious group. Their acts of social rebellion constitute an exercise of agency within an otherwise oppressive sensory environment. Additionally, the effectiveness of their reasoning (Christians stink) as a warrant for retreat from shared social spaces exposes the instability of racial and religious categories, as well as of the olfactory codes

one group may choose to assign to another. *Malta* and *Merchant,* with their dramatic scenes of intentional social separation, deliver the message that extreme sensory states can serve as an impetus for individual acts that assert social agency, even within a hegemonic religious structure that considerably shapes the social framework.

The scenes in which Barabas and Shylock use olfactory disgust to describe bodily difference between themselves and Christians echo early modern English discourses in which olfactory disgust stands in for power and difference onstage and in other texts. In drama, people often express revulsion for others' bodies by claiming that they smell, and such claims often accompany judgments about that person's lack of morality or manners. Scenes from early modern drama represent people who smell bad as rude, dull, intemperate, base, or all of the above. For instance, in *Cymbeline* (1611), we are first introduced to the dull, arrogant Cloten when one of the Lords apparently catches a whiff of his body odor: "Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt; the violence of action hath made you reek as a sacrifice: where air comes out, air comes in: there's none abroad so wholesome as that you vent" (1.2.-14).[28] Here, Cloten's stinky shirt clues us in on his boorishness and lack of courtly manners. Similarly, in *The White Devil* (1611), Flamineo mocks a young lord he calls "a new upstart," who he claims smells "worse of sweat than an under tennis-court keeper" (5.1.149, 153-54).[29] While these scenes suggest one can "smell rank" in more than one way, other texts of the period use discourses of olfaction to confirm and maintain class hierarchies. For example, in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Stephen Gosson's rebuke of dice and card players includes the charge that they "stinke

[28] Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, ed. Valerie Wayne (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[29] Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. Benedict S. Robinson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

almoste in euery mans nose."[30] Richard Arnold, in his chronicles of London's charters and customs, complains of the "obhomynable savours" emitted by merchants' unclean hounds, lamenting that "when the wynde is in any poyte of the northe all the fowle stynke is blowen ouer the citee."[31] Given Benedict Robinson's assertion that the early modern period is "pivotal" for the category of disgust (the first documented use of the word "disgust" in English is in 1598), it is unsurprising that the period so often depicts disgust at foul odors in order to demarcate certain groups of people as others.[32] Early modern expressions of disgust tend to work in the way William Ian Miller observes: they rank people in moral and social hierarchies in order to "confirm others as belonging to a lower status and… necessarily define oneself as higher."[33] Onstage, olfactory disgust serves as a way to discredit, slander, and alienate people because of their bodies, usually in a way that reifies existing power structures in the period.

In *Malta* and *Merchant*, the olfactory disgust Jewish characters express for Christians contests the period's dominant discourses around the political and interpersonal uses of smell and disgust. Namely, *Malta* and *Merchant* represent a disempowered group as disgusted by an empowered one, and reverse the general rule in which a society's dominant group assigns itself a "pleasant or neutral smell" (Miller 103). These plays invert the expected early modern belief in the *foetor judaicus*, an anti-Semitic idea that Jews emitted an unwholesome odor. Some scholars have argued that this alleged odor was prevalent in England: James Shapiro characterizes the belief as

[30] Stephen Gosson, *The schoole of abuse conteining a plesaunt inuectiue against poets, pipers, plaiers, iesters, and such like caterpillers of a commonwealth* (London: 1579), sig. D4(r).
[31] Richard Arnold, *In this booke is conteyned the names of ye baylifs custos mairs and sherefs of the cite of London* (Antwerp: 1503), sig. F2(v).
[32] Benedict Robinson, "Disgust c. 1600," *ELH* 81, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 553-83, 573.
[33] William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), x-xi.

"unusually persistent," while David Katz argues it was a "universally accepted fact" that this odor "was not dissipated by baptism, but was instead a racial characteristic."[34] Less convinced that such an "infamous" odor was widely accepted, Janet Adelman suggests medieval laws requiring Jews to wear distinctive badges and clothing show that, as a group, they "could not be counted on to be reliably different."[35] Modern scholarly debate on the *foetor judaicus*'s validity, in fact, echoes early modern debate. For instance, the Protestant writer John Foxe invokes excrement in a tale about a "wretched superstitious Jewe" who dies after refusing to get out of a privy he falls into on the Sabbath. Foxe's tale echoes Chaucer's Prioress's Tale, in which Jews similarly cast a slain Christian child into a privy where they "purgen hire entraille."[36] The offensive odor was often linked to excrement, a reflection, Sharon Achinstein suggests, of Jews' religious recalcitrance: "The Jews, indeed, were excremental—they were what was left over, an earthly remainder and a painful reminder to Protestants that their work of purging the world of material sin was not yet finished."[37] Germans were more likely to believe in the *foetor judaicus* and reference smell as a confessional characteristic: Sebastian Münster writes a dialogue, originally in Hebrew and later translated into English, in which a Christian accuses Jews of angering God: "you no longer are Gods inheritance, and beloved people,

[34] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 36; Katz, *History of the Jews in England*, 108.
[35] Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943); Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 167, n. 30.
[36] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, ed. Josiah Pratt (London: Seeleys, 1877) 2:535; Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Prioress's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford University Press, 2008), 209-212, 210.
[37] Sharon Achinstein, "John Foxe and the Jews," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, (2001), 86-120, 89.

but rather yee are an abomination in his eies, and a stink in his nostrils."[38] In this passage, the Jews' disobedience manifests as sensory displeasure.

However, not all early modern writers subscribe to belief in the *foetor judaicus*; some, outside of England, find it slanderous and false. Prior to his notorious anti-Semitic writings, Martin Luther condemns Christians who accuse Jewish people of "having Christian blood if they don't stink" as inimical to conversion efforts.[39] Additionally, Thomas Calvert translates a work by Samuel Marochitanus, a Moroccan Jew who converted to Christianity, in which Marochitanus derides the "folly or vanitie" of Romans who dub the Jewish "foetentes Iudaeos, The stinking Iews, or, Breath-stinking Iews."[40] Irrespective of their attitudes toward the *foetor judaicus*, early modern writers reference the myth for moral and religious arguments without explicitly questioning its legitimacy (or lack thereof).

But while most English writers fail to interrogate the *foetor judaicus*, they were capable of reflection on this myth. In Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, which explores various cultural beliefs, Browne characteristically examines the alleged odor at length. His chapter ultimately demonstrates the ways in which smell can reveal the slippage of the racial categories "Jew" and "Gentile." Questioning the validity of a theory of ethnically-derived smell, Browne seems skeptical: "That the Jews stinck naturally, that is, that in their race and nation there is an evil savour, is a received opinion wee know not how to admit."[41] In fact, Browne ultimately proposes a theory of smell that is nothing like

[38] Sebastian Münster, The Messias of the Christians and the Jewes, trans. Paul Isaiah (London, 1655), sig. B3(v).
[39] Martin Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," in *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: a Reader*, ed. Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2012), 76-83, 83.
[40] Samuel Marochitanus, "The Blessed Jew of Marocco," trans. Thomas Calvert (York, 1648), sig. F3(r).
[41] Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxica Epidemica Vol. I*, ed. Robin Robbins (Oxford University Press, 1981), 324.

the *foetor judaicus*: he not only argues it is impossible to "fasten a material or temperamental propriety upon any nation," but finds an odor that is "gentilicious or national unto the Jews" particularly unlikely given their strict dietary regimens.[42]

The *OED* defines "gentilicious," Browne's now-obsolete word, derived from the Latin "gens," as "pertaining to, or characteristic of, a nation" in Browne's chapters on Jews, and defines the chapter's use of "national" as "of a quality, attribute, etc…distinctive or characteristic of a nation." That Browne writes both terms—"gentilicious *or* national"—suggests that "gentilicious" registers some meaning that adds to or complicates the idea of something "national." The related adjective, "gentilitial," defined in one sense as "Of or pertaining to a gens or family," both narrows and further complicates Browne's use of "gentilicious": it links the Latin "gens" (meaning a people or tribe) to qualities that are particular to a specific family or group. The root word "gens" in these definitions is far and away more likely to indicate a people or family rather than "gentiles," another word that appears to be related. Linked to identifying properties specific to one lineage rather than to the broad swath of peoples represented under the marker of "gentile," "gentilicious" thus functions in a way similar to "race" in the early modern imagination, which most commonly meant "A group of people belonging to the same family and descended from a common ancestor; a house, family, kindred." Here, denoting an alleged race-based odor, "gentilicious" aligns form and function: it indicates something possessed by a specific group (like Gentiles). However, Browne's use of the word is also doubly ironic: first, it contains "gentile" but here applies to Jews, and second, it sounds like "delicious" but here refers to an "unsavory odour."[43] I

[42] Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 324.
[43] Ibid.

underscore the ironic resonances of "gentilicious" to propose the word as a conceptual microcosm of Barabas's and Shylock's inversion of the *foetor judaicus*. Their reversal of the ostensible dynamics of olfaction and disgust transforms stinky Jews into disgusted Jews and disgusted Christians into stinky Christians. Thus, when Barabas, a Jewish-identified character, claims to have smelled the friars, the *foetor judaicus* morphs into a "gentilicious" (literally, Gentile-specific) odor (4.1.23). This inversion preserves some of the irony of "gentilicious"; while literally a "gentil[e]" odor, judging from Barabas's revulsion, it is anything but delicious.

Both Jewish characters categorize Christians by assigning them unique, collectively shared qualities, ironically mirroring the logic of racialist early modern characterizations of Jews.[44] Scholars who write on the racialization of Jews in early modern Europe have noted the perceived links between genealogy and religion that problematize the efficacy of conversion.[45] While disgust may feature more prominently in the myth of the *foetor judaicus* than in other early modern ideas of Jewishness, these other ideas still evince anxieties about the boundaries between bodies, and some affix difference to certain bodies as a way of demarcating such boundaries. Some early modern racialist accounts stated that Jews possessed unflattering hereditary traits, including

[44] Since their expulsion in 1290, official records of Jews in England are scarce until 1656, when, under Cromwell's rule, a group of Sephardic Jews was identified and allowed to remain in England. While Shapiro finds the claim that there were no or very few Jews in England between 1290 and 1656 "exaggerated," he, too, notes there is no evidence of organized communities of Jewish people during this period (Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 68). On the history of Jewish expulsion and reintroduction to England, see also Katz, *The Jews in the History of England*, and Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*.
[45] The main critical account informing the field's consensus that early modern notions of Jewishness were racialized comes from Jerome Friedman, "Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, (1987) 3-30. See also Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations*; Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); and Dennis Austin Britton, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern Romance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

genetic propensities to illness. Robert Burton claims they have "goggle eyes," among other "infirmities," while Samuel Purchas writes that epilepsy, or the "falling sickness" is "usual among the Jews."[46]

Other accounts associated Jews with malicious harm of non-Jews. Hailing from the Middle Ages, some legends from the continent stated that Jews poisoned Christians' wells, while others claimed they were adept at medicine and poison.[47] These tales were less common in England, but we see similar anxieties at work when, in 1594, Gabriel Harvey reports that Rodrigo Lopez, the physician to Elizabeth I, had attempted to murder her. Harvey relies on two claims: first, that despite Lopez's conversion to Christianity, he was "by race a Jew of Portugal"; second, that Lopez had planned to use poison.[48] Jonathan Gil Harris cites Lopez's execution as one instance in a broader Elizabethan tendency to imagine Jewish people as poisoners: "the belief that Jews poisoned wells readily translated itself into a more general association of Jews, and specifically their bodies, with poison."[49] In brief, racialist discourses' association of Jewish people with vulnerable bodies on both sides of the self/other boundary mark them as racially different. *Malta* and *Merchant* subvert this effect; they racialize Christians by centering Jewish characters' perceptions of them as threats to their emotional and physical well-being.

As categories of perception and emotion, smell and disgust are phenomenologically distinguished by their requirement of belief that something can be

[46] Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (London, 1625), sig. T1(r).
[47] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 96-98.
[48] Gabriel Harvey, *The prototype of Shylock, Lopez the Jew, executed 1594,* ed. Frank Marcham (Waterlow and Sons, 1927), 2.
[49] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of social pathology in early modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 82.

incorporated into (or invade) one's body.[50] Indeed, disgust's urgency and certainty are what make it part of the constant attitude Foucault terms "the care of the self."[51] Some writers claim that disgust fundamentally entails desire: Descartes argues that disgust results from excessive indulgence of desire that renders the once-desirable disgusting.[52] Similarly, William Ian Miller suggests that social taboos create a category of objects marked as disgusting that nonetheless have "the power to allure."[53] Disgusting objects generate two opposite but simultaneous impulses for Barabas and Shylock: they cause them to turn away from Christians, but also assume their orientation toward the object. Olfactory perception, to borrow a Heideggerian expression, requires "attunement" to Christians as a known source of olfactory displeasure.[54] Because disgust requires familiarity with the disgusting object or its close kindred, I would suggest there are two subcategories of the disgusting, which may in some cases overlap. The first category contains objects that likely disgust most people regardless of personal (or cultural) associations: for instance, excrement (and other bodily secretions), rotten food, and certain rodents and bugs. The second category contains objects that disgust a particular

[50] For smell in early modern culture, see Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise & Stench in England 1600–1770* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Mary Dobson, *Tudor Odours* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Jonathan Gil Harris, "The Smell of *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2007): 465-486; and Mark S. R. Jenner, "Civilization and Deodorization? Smell in Early Modern English Culture," in *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, ed. Peter Burke, Brian Harrison, and Paul Slack (Oxford University Press, 2000), 127-144.
[51] Foucault suggests the classical idea of the "technē tou biou," or art of existence, is "dominated by the principle that says one must 'take care of oneself'"; see Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 3*, trans. Robert Hurley (Toronto: Random House, 1986), 47.
[52] René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), article 87.
[53] Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, 111. Sianne Ngai counters views of disgust as dialectic, asserting that disgust is "a structured and agonistic emotion carrying a strong and unmistakable signal, while desire is often noisy and amorphous… disgust is "never ambivalent about its object… [but rather] is urgent and specific." See Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2005, 335.
[54] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, World, Finitude, Solitude*, Trans. William McNeil and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 59.

individual because of associations and meanings that accrete over time. The category of individually significant disgust coexists more comfortably with Barabas's and Shylock's theories of smell and the body. Both characters cite their sensory perceptions as warrants for disgust, thereby disclosing their individual orientations toward the disgusting.

By tracing the contours of smell and disgust in *Malta* and *Merchant*, we uncover the instability of racial hierarchies, particularly their alignment with religious and political power. These plays represent the racial valences of disgust as complex and as resisting a hegemonic view of "othering" in racial logics: namely, assumptions that only one group is "an other," or that these "others" cannot experience the dominant group as alien, strange, and, in this case, disgusting. *Malta* and *Merchant* represent these Jewish characters' disgust as particular to their individually embodied perceptions of Christians. However, Barabas and Shylock also shore up their individual disgust with references to their Jewish identities (imagined as a shared religious inheritance) and with claims that Christians collectively embody the disgusting.

I. "A custom held with us"

In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas is categorically disgusted by the smell of Christians. Both he and Shylock project Christian collectivity onto the smells of others, and Barabas in particular shores up his claims about olfactory disgust with reference to his Jewish identity and rituals. *Malta*'s representation of Barabas's religious self-fashioning has been much commented on, and a number of critics have highlighted the performative and instrumental forms it often takes. Emily Bartels characterizes Barabas as "above all a capitalist selling himself as 'the Jew' to gain advantage over and take advantage of

others."[55] Taking a similar stance, Chloe Preedy notes that Marlowe's schemers, Barabas included, use references to religion rather than other facets of identity in order to vindicate plans and actions to undo existing social bonds and structures.[56] At its extremes, the play's depictions of religious justification for campaigns of destruction and revenge can be taken as constituting its distinct model of antagonistic villainy. As Stephen Greenblatt has observed, Barabas's hostility toward Christians shows him to "fashion [himself] not in loving submission to an absolute authority but in self-conscious opposition."[57] Recently, Judith Haber's analysis of the "queer" play of irony in *Malta* further uncovers the instability of the meaning of its religious rhetoric. Barabas, she asserts, "(correctly) associates the ideologies society uses to demonize him—Pauline Christianity and patrilineal descent—with one another and he ironizes them both."[58] These critical accounts reveal some of the ways in which Barabas's stated "profession" as a Jew collides and coincides with the other as a duplicitous villain, deconstructing rather than constructing religious identity. I would add that, while his idiosyncratic allusions to embodied religious rituals may alienate Christians, they also further undermine the ascription of any "essential" Jewishness to his character.

As I have suggested, to assume that Marlowe (or Shakespeare) presents olfactory sensitivity or aversion to Christian smells as an innately "Jewish" property would be an oversimplification. But while the discourse of smell may challenge Christian/Jewish hierarchies in the play, the dramatic representation of Barabas's body in conjunction with

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[55] Emily Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 97.
[56] Chloe Preedy, "Bringing the House Down: Religion and the Household in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*," *Renaissance Studies* 26, no. 2 (2010): 163-79, 165.
[57] Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 114.
[58] Judith Haber, "Marlowe's Queer Jew," *Renaissance Drama* 47, no. 1 (2019): 1-20, 20.

his olfactory disgust has the potential to objectify and essentialize his sensitivity to smell as proper to Jews. Specifically, *The Jew of Malta* contains one of the very few examples in early modern English literature of the stereotype that Jewish people have large, hooked noses, namely Ithamore's remarks on Barabas's instrument of smelling, or his "bottle" nose (3.3.10).[59] Ithamore's invocation of this stereotype is somewhat puzzling, given the dearth of other contemporary examples; it may be a nod to older, theatrical representations of Jewishness, or perhaps he associates Jewishness with the sensitivity to smell and to a propensity for finding Christians disgusting. Nevertheless, in *Malta*, Ithamore appears particularly obsessed with Barabas's nose as the locus of his master's performance of stereotypical "Jewish" wickedness. Ithamore's focus on Barabas's nose, and not any other part of his master's body, links Jewishness to the sensory organ of smelling, aligning an essentially embodied quality with Barabas's aversion to Christians. We see Ithamore make much of Barabas's nose on three separate occasions: after Barabas's exaggerated account of his "trade" of killing sick people, he professes: "O, brave master! I worship your nose for this" (2.3.174). Later, he brags "I have the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-nosed knave to my master, that ever gentleman had!" (3.3.9-10). Upon his master's sneering acknowledgement of the friars—"I smelt 'em ere they came" (4.1.23)—Ithamore addresses Barabas using synechdoche: "God-a-mercy, nose! Let's begone" (4.1.24). Jeffrey Wilson suggests that Barabas's claim to smell the clergy is for comic effect: "we might imagine Alleyn indicating his prosthetic, to raucous

[59] Shapiro writes that, while this stereotype had appeared in medieval English art, in marginal drawings of monastic scribes, and reappeared in the eighteenth century, portrayals of Jews having large, hooked noses were "surprisingly rare in early modern English prints depicting Jews" (34). He further notes that ideas that actors playing Jews onstage wore false noses derives from only three references in the period, and challenges G.K. Hunter's conclusion that this prosthetic was worn (see G.K. Hunter, "Elizabethans and Foreigners," *Shakespeare Survey* 17, 1964, pp. 37-52).

laughter."[60] Ithamore's ambiguous remark may be comical, but whether he comments on the nose's stereotypical "Jewish" appearance, on Barabas's extraordinary sense of smell, or whether his comment functions primarily to illustrate Ithamore's weirdness, his remark calls into question the representation of Barabas's nose onstage. At least one text from the period attests that Barabas's nose was exaggerated in performance. William Rowley's 1609 pamphlet describes a usurer with a "visage (or vizard) like the artificiall Iewe of Mataes nose," a representation that partially accords with medieval theatrical conventions of representing Jewishness onstage by means of oversized prosthetic noses and red beards or wigs.[61] Additionally, highlighting the nose may very well perpetuate anti-Semitism: as Wilson points out, "Marlowe loads [the nose] up with moral significance, aligning a perceived pattern in the Jewish body with a perceived pattern of villainy in the Jewish nation."[62] Somatic markers like prosthetic noses and wigs, however, were first and foremost associated with the devil and usurers more broadly. Accordingly, they often were used to heighten a sense of malice or foreignness rather than Jewishness. As Emma Smith notes, "while there is equivalence in later drama between a usurer and a big nose, the linking term "Jew" is always missing."[63] In Barabas's case, heightened olfactory sensitivity and a prominent nose seem to go hand in hand, but to conclude that the precise significance of this correlation is to make some statement about Jewishness would be tenuous at best. Moreover, it would be reductive to say the play comments on Barabas's

[60] Jeffrey R. Wilson, "Hath Not a Jew a Nose? or, the Danger of Deformity in Comedy," in *New Readings of the Merchant of Venice*, ed. Horacio Sierra (Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 131.
[61] William Rowley, *A search for money* (London: 1609), sig. C2(v).
[62] Ibid.
[63] Emma Smith, "Was Shylock Jewish?" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2013): 188-219, 200.

nose merely to call attention to some "essentially" embodied Jewishness, whether that may be physical appearance or olfactory sensitivity.

Indeed, Barabas's disgust at Christians seems more directly motivated by personal, bodily revulsion than by religious or cultural differences. Barabas's most reasoned and explained account of his disgust for Lodowick, a Christian character, both centers his Jewish identity and places it completely beside the point of his warrants for finding Lodowick disgusting. Consequently, his disgust reads as paradoxically both highly subjective and part of a ritual he ties to collective identity. When Lodowick salutes Barabas on the street, Barabas offers warm wishes for Lodowick's posterity, then, probably aside, mocks his clean-shaven face: "The slave looks like a hog's cheek new singed" (2.3.42-43). Barabas's disgust at Lodowick's face alludes to the prohibition against shaving one's face described in Leviticus 19, which warns Hebrew men not to "round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard." Barabas's invective goes further than noting that a close shave disobeys Jewish law; he explicitly equates the Christian's face to scorched pig's flesh. Consequently, Barabas suggests that his disgust for Lodowick stems not only from social and personal differences, but also from the threat that the Christian's body presents to Jewish law: Christians consume pork, transgressing *kashrut*, Jewish dietary law. After his remark, Barabas apparently walks away, prompting Lodowick to ask him where he is going. Barabas responds by describing a custom he says comes from Judaism:

> No further. 'Tis a custom held with us
> That, when we speak with gentiles like to you,
> We turn to the air to purge ourselves;

For unto us the promise doth belong. (2.3.45-48)

Barabas's choice to walk away from Lodowick and the explanation he offers for that choice are peculiar. It is unclear whether Lodowick contaminates Barabas's air with his bad breath, his body odor, or something else, or whether Barabas merely invokes a makeshift religious reason to express disdain in a socially acceptable register. Mathew R. Martin and Roger E. Moore have both taken note of this scene's implications for the representation of Barabas's Jewish identity. Martin suggests that Barabas's act of walking away is a self-conscious, antagonistic performance of Jewish identity "in defiance of the dominant and hostile Christian society he inhabits…he deliberately and insultingly reasserts his Jewish identity by walking away from [Lodowick]."[64] Moore reads Barabas's puzzling retreat not as a sincere identification with his Jewish heritage, but rather one that uses Jewishness as a "rhetorical trope" that proves to "augment his alien status."[65] Both Moore and Martin read Barabas's claim as a self-conscious attempt to widen the social chasm between himself and Lodowick, but Moore underscores the role of contamination in Barabas's answer: "Barabas desperately tries to avoid the pollution that would come from fraternization with [Lodowick]…he knows that "the Promise doth belong" only to a certain few, like himself."[66] As Moore demonstrates, to assume that contamination presents a real threat to Barabas may require accepting his represented religious sanction at face value; nevertheless, Barabas's orientation away from Lodowick

[64] Mathew R. Martin, "Maltese Psycho: Tragedy and Psychopathology in *The Jew of Malta*," *Literature Interpretation Theory 19*, no. 4 (2008): 367-87, 382-3.
[65] Roger E. Moore, "'I'll Rouse My Senses, and Awake Myself': Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and the Renaissance Gnostic Tradition," *Religion and Literature 37*, no. 3 (2005): 37-58, 44.
[66] Ibid.

and his disgust at Lodowick's gentilicious odor evinces a certain anxiety about his ability to self-individuate and maintain bodily purity after contact with Christians.

Barabas's olfactory anxiety parallels beliefs in the period that people are what they smell. Early modern theories of smell emphasized the intimate and uncontrolled contact between smell-emitting object and smelling subject. According to Galenic medical theory, the dominant medical model of embodiment and sensation in late 16th-century England, smells traveled up through the nose into a membrane that connected to the brain and the *sensus communis*, a faculty that unites sensory information from the five senses in a common consciousness.[67] Smells could therefore affect one's core bodily constitution. Montaigne views smells in a similar way, suggesting they can fundamentally alter his attitude. Referencing a distinctly Galenic kind of psychological-physiological interaction, he contends that odors "make a change…and work upon my spirits according to their properties."[68] Similarly, Helkiah Crooke, following a Pythagorean belief that people could be nourished by smelling food, wonders whether "Cooks, who...are busie boyling and roasting viands for other men, doe receive so many odours from them that they scarse ever are hungry."[69] Making a similar equivalence between food and the intake of that food, Barabas claims Lodowick resembles a "hog's cheek" (a food expressly forbidden by *kashrut*), then immediately follows up that association with his allusion to an invented custom.

[67] For a notable early modern example of this olfactory model, see Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia a description of the body of man. Together vvith the controuersies thereto belonging* (London, 1616).
[68] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford University Press, 1958), 229.
[69] Crooke, *Mikrocosmographia*, 705.

But while the food connection offers one potential way of understanding Barabas's motivations, the exact factors that constitute the act of purging air from his body remain obscure. *Malta*'s representation of a Christian who contaminates the air in conversation with a Jew is unique in the period's literature. Additionally, no other text represents a requirement for Jewish people to "turn to the air to purge" themselves—the absence of documentation attesting to this religious "custom" makes Barabas's account suspect. However, there are strong echoes of Barabas's stated need to "purge" himself in the period's discourses on the expulsion of bad air. As in the Galenic paradigm, other early modern accounts, too, demonstrate that the sense of smell works as a conduit for humorally tinged air to enter a person's body, where it could alter that person's humoral constitution. At least two other texts from the period explicitly link disgust with the idea that undesirable air from others or from one's environment can linger in the body. The first comes from Thomas Neale, who writes in 1643 that English travelers to foreign countries must take care to "purge the mind" of "those impolished crudities, which may disgust forraigne nations."[70] It is unclear whether Neale worries the English travelers will disgust the people in foreign nations or vice versa. Robinson suggests the answer is both, because each climate has a particular "humour" or temperament, and those who travel must clear out their own in order not to offend others, and this includes the act of being offended at foreign customs.[71] Neale's description of purging one's "humour" may feel less clearly connected to air and smells than Barabas's speech, but both posit an inherent difference between people based on nation or religion, and both suggest that "purging"

[70] Thomas Neale, *A treatise of direction, how to travell safely and profitably into forraigne countries* (London, 1643), sig. C2(r).
[71] Robinson, "Disgust," 559.

oneself works to maintain internal balance, and, to a certain extent, social harmony as well. Ben Jonson plays on this notion of purging in his 1601 play *Poetaster*, in which the character Tucca is perpetually disgusted by others' smells—he uses the word "stink" or "stinkard" eighteen times—and also suggests that bad smells can linger in his perceptual field.[72] In act 3, scene 4, Tucca berates another character: "Faugh! out of my nostrils! Thou stink'st" (3.4.10); later, he apologizes, having realized that the actual culprit was "the savor of a poet I met sweating in the street, [that] hangs yet in my nostrils" (3.4.294–95)." However, Tucca makes no statements about practices or beliefs relating to purging air, smell, or interaction with poets—this is the main difference between his disgust and Barabas's.

The difficulty of separating Barabas's criminality and deception from his Jewishness makes his "custom" feel particularly dubious: he not only invents a false and expedient religious requirement but also invokes what is ostensibly his true religion. Barabas may be represented as walking away simply because Lodowick stinks, rendering his invention of a unique "custom" arbitrary. Barabas's visceral disgust at Lodowick's porcine flesh, along with his duplicity and frequent asides, make his retreat and explanation seem a means of snubbing the Christian under the guise of Jewish religious law. Marlowe may have Barabas retreat in order to conceal his aside about Lodowick's disgusting flesh, but no dialogue in any other scene suggests that he distances himself from other characters during asides. While modern editors have to guess at whether Barabas's comment about Lodowick's "hog's cheek" or any part of his description of his need to "purge" himself is an aside, we know that Barabas also dissembles constantly, as

[72] Jonson, *Poetaster*, in *The Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

evidenced by the sheer abundance of asides originally marked in the 1633 quarto edition.[73] After all, the paradoxical act of simultaneously concealing and disclosing truthful thoughts and intentions reinforces a dramatic character's hypocrisy. While Marlowe's representation of performative adherence to a religious "custom" complicates a reading of Barabas's motivations, it also works to pander to stereotypes about Jewishness. Haber's contention that Barabas "is clearly invested in the letter rather than the spirit, in show rather than meaning and substance" can be applied to his invocation of an imaginary Jewish law as one instance among many of his ironic, exaggerated performances of Jewishness.[74] As a matter of fact, we do see Barabas appear to boast about his duplicity and link it explicitly to Jewishness: "We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please, / And when we grin, we bite; yet are our looks / As innocent and harmless as a lamb's" (2.3.20-22). By framing deception as a skill inherent to Jews, Barabas also sets up an expectation that claims of Jewish religious belief may be for expediency or survival rather than for authenticity.

However, these possible explanations of Barabas's claims do not account for his self-report of his experience of the interaction. Indeed, Barabas's strange actions are not accounted for by any existing religious or racial stereotype, but because he claims to need to "purge" himself after speaking with Lodowick. The embodied "custom" Barabas offers up as a religious imperative complicates views that his character is a stereotypically poisonous and untrustworthy Jew: after all, his explanation reminds Lodowick that he, too, experiences bodily vulnerability. Adding the accusatory force of "gentiles like unto you," Barabas answers Lodowick's question directly and thoroughly. Barabas's response

[73] Marlowe, *The famous tragedy of the rich Ievv of Malta* (London, 1633).
[74] Haber, "Marlowe's Queer Jew," 3.

to the sight of Lodowick's "hog's cheek" represents his withdrawal as a way to reject the disgusting and maintain purity. By the logic of disgust, Barabas's act of "[turning] to the air to purge" himself honors the spiritual belief that "the promise doth belong" to Jews alone (2.3.47-48). Although his described religious practice does not exist, Barabas still asserts a need to turn away and purge the air from his nostrils, an act that increases the space between himself and the object of disgust, Lodowick's body. Barabas's speech exemplifies the subjectivity of experiences of olfaction and disgust by covering over personal, visceral incompatibility with an invented religious belief. Nevertheless, by attributing that bodily incompatibility to Jewishness, his claim also demonstrates that using disgust to maintain social distance hinges on the very fluidity of the category of the disgusting.

When Barabas asserts a relationship between religious belief and embodied practice, he echoes ideas in the period that religion is embodied in innate ways and destabilizes notions that a character's embodiment of religion perforce racializes and objectifies them. As Shapiro has shown, early modern anti-Semitism is not a product of merely theological beliefs; rather, Jewish difference was imagined as being shaped by other perceived racial traits as well: "in late sixteenth-century England, theology is not juxtaposed with racial thinking; in fact, it helps produce and define it."[75] The categorical and discursive overlaps in Browne's term "gentilicious" illustrate a salient example of the relationship between race and religion Shapiro describes here. As the "gens" in "gentilicious" suggests, something that is "gentilicious" is inherent to a people (either in the sense of nation or lineage) and suggests qualities that are fixed because of this shared

[75] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 84.

inheritance. Distinguished from the *OED*'s one given version of the term that indicates something "characteristic of a 'gentile,'" the separation of national from genealogical notions of inheritance parallels the main operative uses of "race" in the period. The ascription of "gentilicious" properties thus relies on several assumptions about the group to whom they are ascribed: first, that religious classification resists confinement to either strictly genealogical or national models of shared inheritance; second, that notions of *kind* (not excluding racial ones) demarcate geographical or familial boundaries; and finally, I suggest, that that all-but-subsumed term, "gentile," can both indicate a multiplicity of families and nations and stand in for actual ones. As in the period's racialized notions of Jewishness, while neither a discrete family or nation, "gentile" stands in for both (the "gens" in "gentile" reinforces the singularity of an indicated group), and assumes a religious inheritance that is fixed.

Barabas's contention that the "promise" granted to Jews cannot be shared with Lodowick because he is a Gentile racializes Gentile identity, imbuing it with notions of bodily inheritance and commonality. While Barabas claims the "promise" or religious inheritance of Jewishness is grounded in embodied perception, his claim suggests that, while *Malta* represents his religion as embodied, that mode of embodiment directly contradicts early modern hierarchies in which Christians objectify and Jews are objectified. By inventing a Jewish purity law, Barabas licenses himself to express personal distaste by disguising it as a broader cultivated aversion to all "gentiles like unto" Lodowick. Additionally, his characterization of Gentiles as a fundamentally disgusting group directly inverts the expectation that Gentiles would be disgusted by the *foetor judaicus*. Barabas may be a well-known master of subversion and irony, but his

represented need to purge his nostrils of gentilicious air aligns his religious identity with his particular orientation away from Lodowick. His categorization of Lodowick as impure because he is a Gentile projects a collective and inherent bodily property onto all Christians, one that Barabas represents as containing the potential to destabilize his body's inner balance and revoke his claims to religious inheritance. Expressions of disgust authorize him to exercise bodily agency by intentionally leaving the social space of conversation with a Christian, thereby unsettling the racial and religious hierarchies that would seek to forcibly expel him from the city on others' terms.

II. Gaping Pigs and Merchant-Flesh

In *Malta*, we see unequivocally olfactory disgust for Christians when Barabas claims that the spiritual inheritance of Jewishness requires him to purify himself after speaking with Christians. *Merchant*'s Shylock, too, expresses revulsion at the smell of Christians, specifically their food; his response to a dinner invitation is downright hostile: "Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into!" (1.3.30-32). However, Shylock's disgust is not as clearly linked to olfaction elsewhere in the play, except perhaps when he invokes pork a second time in the trial scene (4.1.46). Additionally, Shylock seems far more ambivalent about his disgust for Christians, in particular, for Antonio, who simultaneously repels and attracts him. Shylock's contempt for Antonio, whom he calls the "fawning publican" of the social sphere, feels severe, but he also pines after the opportunity to remove Antonio's flesh. (1.3.37). We never learn exactly why, according to Jessica, Shylock "would rather have Antonio's flesh / Than twenty times the value of the sum / That he did owe him"

(3.2.285-87). According to Shylock, the pound of flesh offers no utility or intrinsic value, but he desires it "to bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge" (3.1.48-49). Given Shylock's stated aversion to both pork and Antonio, and his evocation of the image of a "gaping pig" to explain his loathing for Antonio, how are we to read his apparent obsession with removing and possessing Antonio's flesh? When considering Shylock's attitude toward pigs' flesh and Antonio, the differences seem irreconcilable: pork repulses him while taking Antonio's flesh apparently captivates him. But the slippage between Antonio's flesh and pigs' flesh both complicates and is complicated by Shylock's simultaneous disgust at and desire for Antonio. The result is that his disgust registers a different kind of ambiguity than the kind Barabas represents in his dubious religious practice.

In what follows, I move from an analysis of representations of Jewish characters' disgust at Christians' smells to a consideration of how Christian bodies resonate in representations of Shylock's disgust as visceral, personal, and often unexplained. While references to smell are relatively more dispersed in *Merchant* than they are in *Malta*, Shylock's disgust offers us an understanding of the personal significance he invests in embodied beliefs and practices. This focus, I suggest, helps us view Shylock's disgust along the lines Robinson proposes—as a "positive condition of bodily life."[76] In turn, this reading also resists collapsing disgust into his character's hatred for and violent intentions toward Antonio. The epistemological problem of emotions in the play, I suggest, has different consequences for Shylock than it does for Antonio. The assertion that *Merchant* is preoccupied with strong, unexplained feelings will be nothing new to readers—for

[76] Robinson, "Disgust," 554.

example, Antonio's opening line, "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad" (1.1.1), has occasioned Drew Daniel to consider whether we ought to take his "negation of self-knowledge as a direct confession of a problem he cannot solve or as a coy evasion of a truth he would rather not speak."[77]

Regardless of the fact that Antonio's melancholy "at once creates and resists knowledge," his friends do not hesitate to identify and sympathize with his mysterious sadness.[78] But when Shylock similarly displays strong, unexplained emotion, other characters react with antipathy. For instance, Shylock's tautological anti-response to the question of why he hates Antonio in the first place—"Some men love not a gaping pig" (4.1.46)—evinces his disgust, which is more difficult to sympathize with than grief or shame in part because it looks like undue hatred with a psychologically legible motive. Indeed, Shylock's answer draws Bassanio to charge him with irrationality—"This is no answer, thou unfeeling man, / To excuse the current of thy cruelty" (4.1.62-63). Although Shylock is anything but an "unfeeling man" (for example, we see him mourn the turquoise ring he received from his late wife, which Jessica takes when she flees his house (3.2.109-11), the play's Christians tend to discount or dehumanize, indeed, bestialize Shylock's emotions. For instance, Salanio refers to Shylock as the "dog Jew" howling in the streets, and Graziano insists that Shylock's desires are fundamentally "wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous" (2.8.14; 4.1.137). The fact that Shylock's disgust is so commonly misunderstood, however, is precisely what makes it worth further study. As with *Malta*'s Barabas, Shylock expresses revulsion at Christians to assert his

[77] Drew Daniel, The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 92.
[78] Ibid.

individuation and agency in *Merchant*'s social and affective economies, in which his Jewishness otherwise disadvantages him.

Shylock first displays disgust at the smells produced when Christians dine and drink together after Bassanio invites him to dinner to discuss the particulars of their business arrangement. Shylock sarcastically accepts: "Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into! I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" (1.3.30-34). Alluding to the story found in Mark 5:11-13 in which Jesus casts a horde of demons into a herd of swine, Shylock's reference to swine as the "habitation" of demons links the consumption of pigs with exposure to demons. Shylock's choice to use that onetime "habitation" to describe pigs also makes a case that every consuming body is inhabited by what it consumes.

Shylock's argument resembles the logic we see in Barabas's invented custom: certain embodied acts cannot be shared with Christians because they expose him to sensory objects that threaten his self-constitution. Namely, Shylock separates the categories of eating, drinking, and praying from those of buying, selling, and talking. The former are off-limits because they expose him to embodied Christian practices (in which disgusting smells come free of charge) in a way that the latter do not. Interestingly, Shylock assumes that dining with Christians necessarily involves "[smelling] pork" and that he would eat the pork after smelling it. *Merchant* may very well represent a world in which to be a Christian is to eat pork; after all, Lancelet jokes that Jessica's conversion will "raise the price of hogs" and warns her "if we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money" (3.5.21-23). This assumed causality

between the consumption of pork and becoming Christian may explain the slippery-slope logic of Shylock's mental leap from dinner with Christians to smelling pork. Shylock's specific orientation toward pork requires him to avoid spaces where pork is served even if he does not partake in it. For him, smelling pork is as potentially contaminating as eating it. Shylock's disgust at the thought of pork separates him from Christians in that his representation of the experience of dining is constituted by a different disposition (disgust) at even the idea of its smell.

For Shylock, the invasive potential of smell is intimately tied to the prohibitions of *kashrut*, a key part of his personal regime. According to Miller, smell is "much more dangerous than localized substances one may or may not put in the mouth" because it invades an individual's senses regardless of his intentions or actions.[79] Alimentation, as an everyday practice for Shylock, holds consequences not only for his corporeal body, but also his spiritual life. Shylock's vehement refusal of even the possibility of smelling pork is what David Goldstein has called a "failure of commensality": Shylock withdraws from the social space and ritual associated with communal Christian meals. Goldstein argues for a connection between the play's emphasis on the importance of food and its representation of characters' mortality and vulnerability: "the whole world of this play is potentially consumable… this means that its characters are also potentially edible, and therefore vulnerable."[80] What I would add to his analysis is a focus on how the body itself senses and reasons with olfactory information—smell is, after all, the sense most closely related to food after taste.

[79] Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, 66.
[80] David Goldstein, *Eating and Ethics in Shakespeare's England*, p. 67

But while kosher law might logically explain Shylock's revulsion toward pork, his affective response seems generated by a disgust more particular to his own body. Michael Schoenfeldt has shown that early modern dietary regimens carry individual as well as social significance.[81] The diet that defines Shylock's personal regime is represented as helping him to achieve individuation and agency in *Merchant*'s society. Shylock's invocation of disgust, in Schoenfeldt's terms, "allows us to see that this self is far more than just an effect of discourses, or the product of sociocultural discourses, institutions, and practices."[82] Shylock's dietary regimen ultimately works to constitute his body as a site of temperance, control, and agency. Represented as an early modern subject, Shylock would have been influenced by the widespread belief in the importance of knowing one's own body. While not focused exclusively on diet, in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton argues that what constitutes bodily temperance varies profoundly from person to person: "And what can be more ignominious and filthie… then for a man not to knowe the structure and composition of his owne body, especially since the knowledge of it, tends so much to the preservation of his health, & information of his manners."[83] Knowledge of one's body works in conjunction with other social or religious rules for self-governance—to preserve one's own health and maintain temperance, Shylock seems to say, it is necessary to consume only what one knows one can digest. To that end, his regimen depends not only on Jewish religious discourses and practices, but also the knowledge of his body's particular sensitivities.

Shylock's disgust creates opportunities not just to avoid Antonio, but also to

[81] Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19.
[82] Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 12.
[83] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford University Press, 1628), 52.

actively tend to his body and Jewish identity while others denigrate him through verbal and physical abuse and, later, forced conversion. Shylock hates Antonio, he tells us, "for he is a Christian" (1.3.38). Likewise, in Shylock's account, Antonio's only expressions of hatred are rooted in both embodied disgust and anti-Semitism. The motivation for Antonio's aversion might be explained by Shylock's account: "what's his reason? I am a Jew" (3.1.53); however, Antonio expresses his aversion not in a dialogic, reasoned form, but rather, by spitting, an act of embodied disgust directed toward Shylock in particular. Antonio regularly threatens him, calls him names, and spits on him, Shylock claims:

> You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,
>
> And spat upon my Jewish gaberdine—
>
> …You, that did void your rheum upon my beard
>
> And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
>
> Over your threshold! (1.3.107-08, 113-15)

Antonio's kicking and spitting casts Shylock as less than human—specifically, as a dog. Indeed, as other critics have more fully demonstrated, Shylock is "relentlessly bestialized" by canine references in the play.[84] But what seems to offend Shylock most are the residual, material signs that Antonio's disgust leaves on his body and clothing. Antonio spits on his "Jewish gaberdine" and ejects his "rheum" on his beard (1.3.114). In pointing out the material sites of Antonio's spitting, Shylock calls attention to his beard and gabardine as emblems of his selfhood. It is unclear whether Shylock's clothing and

[84] For discussions of the bestialization of Shylock, see Boehrer, Bruce. "Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet: Thinking Social Exclusion in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1999, pp. 152-170, and Paul Yachnin, "Shakespeare's Public Animals," in *Humankinds: The Renaissance and Its Anthropologies*, ed. Andreas Höfele and Stephan Laqué (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 185–89.

the style of his beard would mark him as an outsider onstage, given Portia's query in court: "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.170). Emma Smith has suggested that scholarly insistence that Shylock "'looked Jewish' on the Elizabethan stage," have "very little archival or historical basis."[85] In particular, Shylock's reference to his "Jewish gabardine" attests to the fact that the gabardine was simply a long coat that could be worn by anyone at the time, one that M. Channing Linthicum demonstrates was not a "compulsory garment for Jews" but rather, simply, "a useful garment for soldiers, horsemen, or travelers, whatever their status."[86] Whether or not Shylock's clothing and beard distinguish him as Jewish, they serve as material loci of significance for his identity: clothing, after all, possesses an "ability to 'pick up' subjects, to mold and shape them both physically and socially, to constitute subjects through their power as material memories."[87] Shylock resents Antonio's spitting, an act of disgust that not only degrades him but also leaves a vile texture—the vestige of a disgusting Christian—on his beard and coat, which he links to his Jewish identity.

Since Shylock defines his identity through individuation and self-differentiation from Christians, it is possible to read his disgust as extending to Christians more broadly; however, the play does offer evidence that his disgust may be particular to Antonio. For instance, in the trial scene, Shylock refuses to change his tune (played in the key of "gaping pig") that bodily repulsion is the best way to explain his "strange apparent cruelty" toward Antonio (4.1.20). In the courtroom scene, Shylock's account of his hatred

[85] Smith, "Was Shylock Jewish?" 189.
[86] M. Channing Linthicum, *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 200, 201.
[87] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

for Antonio sounds nothing like his earlier assertion that religious and social difference forms the basis ("I hate him for he is a Christian" [1.3.38]). Instead, Shylock suggests that his loathing is not always religiously significant but might simply amount to his humor. He neither commits to nor denies any particular motivation, but holds that individual disposition rather than religious belief motivates his disgust:

> Some men there are love not a gaping pig!
> Some that are mad if they behold a cat!
> And others, when the bagpipe sings i' th' nose,
> Cannot contain their urine. For affection,
> Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes. (4.1.46-51)

Shylock's list is puzzling in several ways. The list is not unified by subject (he invokes food, another animal, and a musical instrument) or by any one of the senses—indeed, he invokes the nose when referencing the bagpipe, which is unusual considering that we expect musical instruments to be linked to sound. Shylock's previously stated aversion to pork mentions its smell, but here, the pig is not directly described in terms of smell. The speech lacks unification on the basis of categories of objects and categories of senses. The only thing that connects the objects that Shylock cites each one as a trigger of involuntary bodily responses, including disgust.

In his laundry list of aversive objects, Shylock distances his affect from the other kinds presented in the play; even in the case of Antonio's mysterious sadness at the beginning, there is an existing but unnamed motivation, as several named potential causes are denied flat-out. In the case of Shylock's emotions, this relationship is inverted: he

hates Antonio for a nonexistent but named reason. Indeed, he does not describe the disgust itself, but rather an equivalence between his loathing of Antonio and other arbitrary aversions. Shylock asserts the common lack of any "firm reason to be rendered" in each affective compulsion and claims his hatred for Antonio is also part of this category: it is disgust, an involuntary somatic response. However, Shylock's appeal to individual orientations toward the disgusting fails to garner sympathy from the other characters, who find both his disgust and explanation of it abhorrent. Other critics have commented on Shylock's non-explanation of his hatred toward Antonio in this scene. Gail Kern Paster finds Shylock's answer a "brilliant naturalization" of his hatred for Antonio because it renders all bodies equivalent in their humoral quirks.[88] Paster writes: "It is in Shylock's interest—and perhaps a conventional element of Shylock's character as a stage Jew—to portray the bodily humors as fixed and irreducible."[89] Lara Bovilsky argues that, on the contrary, Shylock's choice to present a "notion of antipathy inhering in matter itself" actually paints him as a less sympathetic character, whose cruelty inheres in his body.[90] As both of these accounts show, one of the rhetorical effects of Shylock's speech is its intensification of the links between emotion and individual embodiment.

The significance of Shylock's disgust in his reasoning, however, complicates the resonances of his hatred for Antonio. A focus on bodily disgust (which is different from aversion) not only accounts for Shylock's strange insistence on the somatic nature of his hatred, but also leaves his reasoning intact without aligning it with some imagined "essential" Jewishness. Without taking Shylock's disgust seriously, the representation of

[88] Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*, (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 207.
[89] Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 209.
[90] Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play*, 148-49.

his anti-rationale fortifies notions that he has no good reason to hate Antonio—for instance, Portia repeatedly insists that Shylock "must" be merciful, prompting his angry retort: "On what compulsion must I?" (4.1.179). Shylock's speech may make a case for the equalizing force of individual variation—every person has an unexplained bodily response to *something*—but it does not help Christians relate to him. Instead, Antonio and Graziano imbricate Shylock's hatred in his Jewishness, claiming, respectively, that his "Jewish heart" is fundamentally hard and that Shylock sharpens his knife "Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew" (4.1.122).

The accusatory force of the label "Jew" is central in both these accounts of Shylock's cruelty—instead of accepting Shylock's non-explanation of his "humoral" affect for Antonio as such, the Christians in these discourses cancel his version of the relationship between identity and hatred and instead reassert notions that, as a Jew, Shylock's hatred is lodged in racial and religious difference. When the Duke remarks that even "stubborn Turks and Tartars" would pity Antonio (4.1.31), he does not attempt to include Shylock in "some part of corporate Venetian selfhood," as Paster sees it, so much as lay the groundwork to perceive malignity in Shylock's reply that it is only a "lodg'd hate and a certain loathing" he bears for Antonio (4.1.59).[91] Given the Duke's insistence that Shylock, the only religious and racial minority in the courtroom, is worse than Turks and Tartars, his humor morally segregates him from Venetian society, and does him no good in demonstrating that Jewishness is not what drives his hatred.

Before Shylock testifies in court, the Duke's demand, "we all expect a gentle answer, Jew," discursively lumps "Jew" together with the moral and religious category of

[91] Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 204.

gent(i)leness (4.1.33). The Duke's emphasis on his expectation of a "gentle" (punning on "gentile") answer from Shylock is at best a patronizing reminder of appropriate courtroom manners directed only at its one specified (and depersonalized) addressee, "Jew." Moreover, the Duke's phrase "we all" alienates Shylock and suggests everyone else in the courtroom is hostile toward him. At worst, "we all expect a gentle answer, Jew" sets up a trap for Shylock if he dares to describe his motivations in consideration of his religious and cultural identity. A "gentle" answer is impossible for someone who identifies as Jewish. Shylock's acquiescence to such a demand would require him to elide his religious beliefs from his account of hatred. Additionally, the directive to give a "gentle" answer undercuts Shylock's experiences of Antonio's acts of racially and religiously motivated harassment. The Christians seem hell-bent on proving that Jewishness drives Shylock's hatred, but nothing in his speech suggests it motivates him more than bodily disgust does. And why *shouldn't* Shylock's own account of embodied perception fuel his hatred, whether or not that perception has anything to do with Jewish identity or beliefs? To problematize a racialized subject's lived experience as a site of reason, affection, and disgust not only denies the far-reaching resonances of racial thinking as experienced by those who are racialized, but also reduces that subject's affect to an essential property of their racial group. The Christians refuse to examine Shylock's statements of feeling or belief on their own merit; thus, they deny his claim that he finds Antonio repulsive on a somatic level. For all of the harm it does by rhetorically imbricating hatred into his "soul" (as Graziano suggests), Shylock's speech presents his revulsion as a function of individuation and health, not necessarily Jewishness.

Rhetorically, Shylock distances the religious and cultural significance of a

"gaping pig" from Jewish identity and instead emphasizes its subjective, affective register—in this case, prompting disgust. The "gaping pig" may not be arbitrary, but, potentially, neither are the other items in Shylock's list. Nothing in Shylock's speech suggests that all of the affective responses he names are not his own, or that his speech does not reveal many of his own associations with the disgusting. But even so, among all the loathsome objects he invokes, Shylock importantly names a "gaping pig" first (4.1.46). In the period, "gaping" indicates a mouth hanging wide open, a customary feature of roasted pigs. Shylock's use of the phrase similarly emphasizes his disgust at the appearance of the imagined pig. In his analysis of Shylock's gaping pig as a metaphor for metamorphosis in literature, Irving Massey emphasizes the repellant nature of the image, which he describes as "the gaping carcass of a freshly disemboweled pig stretched on a board, after seeing the farmer astride the body, knife in the neck, orange blood pouring down the hand, and hearing the screams."[92] In performance, this word would call an audience's attention to the difference between a "gaping" face and a disgusted person's facial expressions—even given cultural and historical distance, it is difficult to imagine any dumbfounded or glazed-over expression as denoting disgust.[93] We know that Shylock hates pork, and he attributes that hatred to his religious dietary regimen. Here, however, he draws attention to an uncontrollable impulse to revile a "gaping pig," outside of Jewish customs and places it within a category of other, random sensory objects in the world, including a "harmless necessary cat" and "a woollen bagpipe" (4.1.54-55).

[92] Irving Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (Berkeley and London, 1976), 202, n. 23.
[93] See the *OED*'s entry on "gape, v." That Shylock speaks of "roast pork" suggests the way that pork is cooked and perhaps the way it smells or looks, but Shylock also evokes a more off-putting image by emphasizing "gaping," which calls to mind a dead animal, its mouth wide open as it is slowly turned on a spit.

Shylock therefore asserts that, within any given sample of people, regardless of religion, class, or other social markings, bodily disgust at such objects in the world can be completely arbitrary. Nevertheless, Shylock's stubborn refusal to elaborate on his motivations ("So can I give no reason, nor I will not / More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing" (4.1.58-59)) serves to perpetuate ideas that he should be hated *because of* his humor, and thereby because of his body as well.

Shylock's speech does not prevent his forced conversion, which serves as the ultimate violence toward his identity and bodily constitution. Forced conversion seizes a sense of self from Shylock without substituting for it an identity that allows for better social integration. Antonio's idea that Shylock must convert to ensure half of his estate goes to Lorenzo and Jessica rather than to the state severs Shylock's identity and its related regimes of self from him. In his last lines onstage, Shylock's reaction to his conversion is strangely somatic in its affect: "I pray you, give me leave to go from hence. / I am not well" (4.1.391-92). What it means for Shylock to *be well* is to have the agency to engage in everyday choices that affect his body; to lose his Jewish identity is to no longer have the choice to avoid the contamination of his body and soul by Christians and their social practices. As his courtroom speech shows, the regulation of such contamination through his personal regime transcends religious law.

In *Malta* and *Merchant*, individual orientations toward disgusting objects and others allow Jewish characters to articulate and reflect on their embodied religious beliefs and identities. A phenomenological reading of disgust and olfaction demonstrates the ways these claims of bodily aversion become a means of asserting individually embodied religious beliefs. Barabas's and Shylock's appeals to Judaism in these scenes illustrate

their orientations toward a collective identity even as they demonstrate that the valences and intensity of their disgust depend on individual instances of the disgusting. Simultaneously signaling group belonging and individuation, references to religious beliefs outline their distinct and discrete subject positions, against the current of racialist and racist early modern discourses (like the *foetor judaicus*) that align embodied Jewishness with the disgusting or with essential hatred of Christians. As Ahmed notes, the state of being oriented carves out a space not only for desired objects on one's bodily horizon, but also for the emergence of perceiving subjects themselves: "I take different directions toward objects: I might like them, admire them, hate them, and so on. In perceiving them in this way or that, I also take a position upon them, *which in turn gives me a position*."[94] Perceiving Christians as objects of olfactory displeasure also repositions the directions and effects of notions of race as essentially embodied. Attending to the language of olfaction and disgust expressed by the Jewish characters of *Malta* and *Merchant* reveals the instability of racial categories that rely on sense perception for the ascription of essential differences.

Without a doubt, religious and social space have always overlapped in some sense, and the sociality of religious belief extends beyond religious identity. The constancy of a relationship with the divine also constitutes social space, and individual believers engage in social relations both in terms of fellowship with a larger religious community, but also intimately in terms of their relationship with God. While overstimulation in *Malta* and *Merchant*—and the desire for distance between the self and the other—is painted specifically in terms of religious difference that affects one's body,

[94] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 28-29.

individuals also experience sensory deprivation as spiritually and physically urgent. Biblical texts such as the Book of Job, widely circulated and preached during the early modern period, prominently illustrate the individual's extreme distress when God appears to pull away, especially when God appears to also punish that person with misfortune, illness, or isolation. As the next chapter demonstrates, in George Herbert's *The Temple*, God's apparent absence creates a dearth of sound for the devotional subject, which precipitates bitter social isolation and, eventually, complete mental and physical breakdown. In the absence of divine auditory reception, our examination of early modern literary representations of interpersonally significant sensory extremes moves from focusing on rhetoric that seeks distance (like that of Barabas and Shylock) to rhetoric that seeks intimacy, support, and healing through God's unconditional love.

III:

HERBERT, HEARING, AND THE SOCIALITY OF DEVOTION

Netflix's *Black Mirror* (2014-), a dystopian science fiction TV series, features an episode illustrating what seems to be the perfect family. The episode, "Black Museum," offers a series of vignettes of a mother and father and their young son, who evidently live a happy life together, until the mother unexpectedly suffers a devastating accident and passes away. A new experimental practice allows scientists to upload the mother's consciousness from her brain to a computer chip inside an object—in this case, a stuffed toy monkey, intended to be a way for her to continue to connect with her grief-stricken son. After this transfer, the mother is effectively inside the monkey, equipped with the ability to utter only two preset phrases for the remainder of her sentient existence: either "Monkey loves you," or "Monkey needs a hug." Deeply unhappy and feeling trapped, the monkey-mother quickly spirals into despair once her son loses interest in the toy (which happens in a matter of days). Other than the mother herself, no one else can ascribe much meaning to the monkey's utterances beyond the surface level of either "monkey loves you" or "monkey needs a hug." The only clues lie in possible rhetorical nuances gleaned from subtle shades of difference in the register, timing, alternation, and repetition of these two messages. The mother's agency in her rapidly shrinking social world depends not only upon her limited power to shape and produce specific utterances, but also upon her increasingly distant son's decision to hear or else ignore her speech. The relationship between the son and his mother (inside the monkey) breaks down completely when the son ceases to respond emotionally to the two limited messages the mother is able to

transmit audibly. The mother's failure to connect via her limited communication options, along with the failure of these messages to elicit emotional responses from her son, magnify feelings of remoteness and futility about her (in)ability to communicate.

Dystopian post-digital age nightmare that it may be, "Black Museum" outlines the bleak feelings of isolation due to unsuccessful channels of auditory communication, an existential state commented on by writers in the seventeenth century, especially in metaphysical poetry. In particular, George Herbert's religious poetry, specifically the poems featured in his 1633 collection *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, reveals the author's well-documented anxieties about temporality, agency, ability, and sociality, among larger religious anxieties that more straightforwardly engage questions of salvation and fallenness. In the case of the two poems I examine in this chapter, which evince anxiety about the ephemerality of our material bodies, *The Temple* presents an nightmarish model of the implications of loss of communicational autonomy, linguistic ability, and the irreversibility of cognitive and hearing loss.

In this chapter, I ask questions about how the limits of human bodies and cognition inform Herbert's efforts to shape his readers' and his own approach to the performance of faith: how does the sense of hearing relate to the phenomenon of religious devotion? What are the long-term effects of social exclusion and isolation on cognition and the body's faculties of speech and language? How does representation of hearing inherently engage issues of sociality regardless of the atmosphere, number of subjects, and human/divine binary? The goal of such questions is to connect the phenomenological realm of perception to the ethics that infuse all collective and interpersonal life. I argue that George Herbert's representations of devotional anxiety represent one modality of

sensory understimulation represented in seventeenth-century English literature, in which devotional speakers interpret silence as distressing isolation from God, despite their efforts to reach God through prayer and supplication. The poems in *The Temple* that I examine register a lack of perceived response from God (audible or otherwise) as a catalyst for the poetic speakers' cognitive and material decline. This brand of sensory deprivation is also represented in the religious poetry of Richard Crashaw as well as that of John Donne, who today is perhaps our best-known example of a sick and anxious seventeenth-century metaphysical poet.[95] For Herbert, the alternative to sensory deprivation is not Byronic hyper-indulgence of the senses. Rather, he aligns a lack of communication and hearing from God with the signs of utter desolation. In moments such as Herbert's line "but no hearing," repeated twice in "Deniall," he suggests that a failure of auditory messaging can register as literal silence, and that the isolation that results from this perceived sensory deficit reduces the cognitive and communicative capacities of these poems' already anxious devotional speakers.

To approach these representations of experiences of sound by individual poetic speakers, it is useful to consider the phenomenon of listening as a substantial factor in auditory communication's function as a social apparatus. A pioneer in studies of historical phenomenology, Bruce R. Smith, details a methodology for a study of the phenomenon of auditory exchange. Smith proposes that we should pay attention to several subdivisions of auditory perception. Namely, he contends, both a "psychology of listening" and a "phenomenology of listening" are necessary in order to understand the complex network of subjective and collective influences at work in auditory experience:

[95] For more on Crashaw and Donne's relationships to devotion and affect, see Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

> First of all there is the intractable individual listener, with his distinctive knowledge and experience, her own particular goals and intentions. To understand these factors, we need a psychology of listening… We must take into account, finally, the subjective experience of sound. We need a phenomenology of listening, which we can expect to be an amalgam of biological constants and cultural variables.[96]

Smith's framework highlights individuality and intentionality as complex factors of auditory experience, making it useful for an analysis of auditory experience as influenced by spiritual and individual goals within devotional poetry. His figuration of an "amalgam of biological constants and cultural variables" shows up in *The Temple* in its explorations of the interface between the devotional body and the (a)social space of the devotional closet (figured as the chamber of the speaker's mind in "The Forerunners" and more literally as a room in "Deniall"). The early modern Protestant culture of devotion, which sets norms for the act of devotion (such as praying alone in an enclosed space) but does not determine any one subject's approach, is contingent upon the subject's unique biological interface with the world.

In *The Five Senses*, Michel Serres helps to further elucidate the relationship between the individual body and external world when he describes the body's penetrable surface as

> a variety of contingency: in it, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and the felt, it defines their common edge. Contingency

[96] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8.

> means common tangency: in it the world and the body intersect and caress each other. (80)

"The feeling and the felt," Serres's terms for the experience of stimuli and stimuli themselves, respectively, define the "common edge" of perceptual experience that is located at the precise point where the subject reaches out for communion with the world, with others, or, in Herbert's case, with God. In *The Temple*, Herbert represents God's presence and absence as forces that impact the human body's makeup and capabilities, as well as human capacity to continue efforts to communicate and engage socially with God.

This is not to say that devotion in its successful or intimate iterations necessarily achieves an opposite effect by making individual supplicants superhuman (or "more human than human" to use Rob Zombie's locution). On the contrary, God's affection (or "sweetness" as Herbert likes to call it) helps to balance and humble the devotional subject by reminding them of his divine goodness and salvation. Herbert's speakers never attain complete absolution from their sins; they simply either do or do not receive grace from God, and Herbert is particularly interested in those cases when grace is nowhere to be found. Herbert's poetry dwells on the uncertainty of devotion and grapples with the difficult task of speaking and listening in the correct register, which he finds often impossible given that no one can truly know what God wants from them or what he requires in order to grant forgiveness and healing. "Deniall" and "The Forerunners," register breakdowns and failures associated with channels of auditory communication between their speakers and God, and align God's lack of grace and response with a breakdown of their speakers' literal and material faculties of cognition and communicative abilities.

The primary social dynamic at work in Herbert's poetry is that of the relationship between the devotional speaker and God. This one-on-one relationship is the one that preoccupies his poetic speakers; the age-old problems of knowing, reckoning with, and engaging in communion with God abound in *The Temple*. Unlike the period's other common poetic forms—for instance, pastoral verse, sonnets, and longer epic works and epyllions like Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*—devotional verse, especially Protestant lyric verse, does not particularly concern itself with any specific wider social field. In general, people other than the speaker rarely show up except as generalized groups that serve as a counterpoint to the idealized figure of the truly devoted Protestant subject (e.g. sinners, women—due to their inconstancy—and other heretics and unbelievers). Since the relationship between the speaker and God is focalized above all other topics, devotional speakers' anxieties about humanity tend to primarily be about themselves.

More precisely, two poems, "Deniall" and "The Forerunners," see Herbert's poetic speaker wrestling with the possibilities of becoming dull with age, as well as losing the ability to use language or communicate effectively. Both poetic speakers imagine themselves disintegrating cognitively and physically, and in their respective images of disrepair and incapacitation, embodiment and cognition are figured as gifts that God lovingly gave… and that he can take away. "Deniall" explores the consequences of an uncommunicative God who refuses to hear or speak to his anxious devotional subject. God's silence eventually renders the speaker into a heap of unusable parts, which Herbert metaphorizes as a musical instrument in disrepair. "The Forerunners" similarly envisions an inescapable process of physical degeneration, in which the ability to generate language

is reduced to just one singular phrase the speaker utters over and over for eternity, namely "Thou art still my God."

To be sure, the precarity of one's ability to command language is prominent in the devotional and personal crises represented in "Deniall" and "The Forerunners," and undercuts the ability of these poetic speakers to continually participate in devotion at a level that feels comfortable and reciprocal. However, I want to contend that auditory stimuli are the true source of power in these exchanges. This power is rooted in the social, relational contingencies around who will listen and who will not. The power to use an utterance, the ability to hear and process everything around us, and the choice of whether or not to speak to another and allow them to hear our voice; these are the struggles of Herbert's anxiously mortal and chronically understimulated devotional speakers. As with *The Jew of Malta*'s overstimulated Barabas, the potential for intimacy and isolation that inheres in all social space is further articulated and defined by the perceptible stimuli that surround it. In the previous chapter, we saw that *Malta*'s Barabas seeks increased physical space and air in order to "purge" himself of unclean humours after speaking with a Christian. Barabas's reasons for leaving the shared physical space of the conversation are overdetermined: the Christian in question annoys Barabas; his skin reminds Barabas of swine; and, he is a Gentile, to name a few sensory elements the text emphasizes.

However, Barabas's disgust gives him the upper hand in a social interaction with a Christian, while Herbert's speakers languish in their *ennui*. This chapter picks up where Barabas's intentional departure from an unwelcome conversation left off. What might it mean to ask how the choice of whether or not to speak to another relates to perceptual

experience, and specifically to the extremes of overstimulation and understimulation? While Marlowe's grossed-out Barabas gives us one side of this dynamic, Herbert's emotionally- and audibly-starved speakers feel the consequences from the other side. That is, when Herbert's devotional speakers are abandoned, especially by those whom they need to soothe them in times of trouble and uncertainty, the result of this understimulation inverts that of overstimulation: trapped, the understimulated speaker reaches out but no one answers. Meanwhile, an overstimulated individual can exercise agency by leaving the arena of overwhelming stimuli. While *Malta*'s Barabas is confronted with overstimulating olfactory information, Herbert's poetic speakers face a dearth of sound, deprived of auditory input (metaphorical or not) from God. In this case, limitations in bodily capabilities, including sense-perception, depend on the availability of specific stimuli and not upon actual capabilities of perception. The consequences are isolation and internal emotional and cognitive collapse. Similar to Chapter One's discussion of Barabas and Chapter Three's of Samson, this chapter demonstrates a link between positive perceptual input and increased social agency. Specifically, however, it shows us the other side of this picture, in which social and sensory deprivation mutually inhere.

The Temple, particularly in the case of these two unusual poems, offers fascinating and curious visions of a life deprived of both the comfort of the stimuli of God's voice and the presence of a beloved (and, in this case, ostensibly also the most *loving*) other. Herbert's poetry figures the effects of abandonment and silence as devastating upheavals of one's own cognitive and emotional ability, and envisions these upheavals as resulting in the speakers' loss of fully human subjectivity. Like the forlorn,

silenced monkey-mother depicted in *Black Mirror*, the speakers of these poems desperately seek opportunities to express their thoughts and to receive God's grace and a response to their devotional messages.

This chapter reaches beyond questions of interpersonal encounters with other people, instead considering encounters with God in representations of religious devotion in order to gain new perspectives on the category of "the social." My analysis focuses on uncovering the social elements and stimulative effects within portrayals of ritually communicative relationships with God. Devotion comprises a functional part of everyday life within the larger early modern social paradigm. Even when the early modern subject leaves the company of his or her family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, time spent in devotion is still a search for an answer to a social call. Omnipresent, God's immediacy (or, alternatively, God's distance) becomes increasingly heightened for the subject who enters the act of devotion.

However, the extension of friendship and intimacy is not always reciprocated. As we will see, the God of *The Temple* is far from always being patient and loving. When he withholds, the speakers' affective states range in intensity from interested and puzzled to miserable and desperate. "Deniall" sees the speaker degenerate from frantic pleas to a pile of parts that can barely speak. "The Forerunners," for its part, portrays its speaker as simply yet another victim of the anxieties of old age, only to transform him into a seventeenth-century broken record. In this way, both poems take the rhetoric of devotional affect beyond a state of conscious cognition or even mental activity. These poems represent the social relationship between God and devotional subjects as one that

requires sensory stimulation, and emphasize the importance of sound and hearing in enabling communion with the divine.

I. "The Forerunners" and the limits of human materiality

In *The Temple*, Herbert's poetic speakers are often ambivalent about their own physical matter. As others have shown, Herbert's own views of the spiritual resonances of matter are unstable; at times, he sees the physical body as a vehicle for pleasurable sensory experiences of God, and at other times, he regards it as a pathological, disgusting weight on the spirit.[97] Nevertheless, matter—and the material self—participate in devotion. Michael Schoenfeldt has demonstrated that the devotional self is material in Herbert's poetry. Schoenfeldt argues that Herbert's focus on physical health (specifically digestion) allows him to explore "the mutually constitutive processes of social and devotional subject formation."[98] More recently, David Glimp has explored representations of "creatures," a term he uses to denote living devotional beings (including animals, rocks, and plants) in Herbert's poetry, arguing that while creatures are divested of personhood in a theology of absolute political sovereignty, they nevertheless operate in a "theological regime of accumulation of praise."[99] (113). Because creatures participate in praise, Glimp argues, Herbert's poetry, at least in a theological register, privileges the "preservation of

[97] Jonathan Gil Harris writes that Herbert sees matter as "decidedly pathological" and something his speakers must cast off to enjoy "a state of grace and spiritual health" (44). Katherine Eggert notes a refusal in Herbert's poetry to engage in questions of what matter itself is made of, as in descriptions of Christ's blood and the Eucharist. See also Skwire and Strait for focus on the material body in Herbert's poems.

[98] Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 130.

[99] Glimp, "Figuring Belief: George Herbert's Devotional Creatures." In *Go Figure: Energies, Forms, and Institutions in the Early Modern World*, edited by Judith Anderson, and Joan Pong Linton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 113.

life" over all other functions of political authority. Glimp draws on Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life," which describes a subject deprived by political authorities of all rights beyond its material existence. For Glimp, the "devotional creature" in Herbert's poetry exemplifies an inclusive devotional project that "defines creation as a vast network of human and nonhuman agents and establishes a way of apprehending the world as a collective in ways that… cut against the grain of humanist or legal accounts of community and political obligation."[100] In fact, Glimp provocatively suggests that human subjectivity, particularly the capacity for thought, can be a disadvantage when participating in acts of devotion, and at one point suggests that Herbert relies on creatures as a kind of "devotional prosthetic" that makes up for humans' lack of "the cognitive and personal equipment to fulfill their pious responsibilities."[101]

The relationship of human thought to privileged modes of devotional subjectivity, however, is more complex in the poems "Deniall" and "The Forerunners." In fact, these poems invert Glimp's assertion that nonhuman subjects supplement human devotion as a kind of prosthesis. Rather, these poems rely on metaphors in which objects represent the devotional subject's mental and emotional state (a musical instrument in "Deniall" and a clump of dirt in "The Forerunners"). Thereby, these poems also infuse such nonhuman material subjects with "human" sentience and modes of communication and suggest that the capacity for devotion hinges on these human abilities, which are the only privileged element of their crude material subjects. In "Deniall," the speaker becomes an incoherent heap of dust, and in "The Forerunners," becomes a basically inert "clod" (5). Both

[100] Glimp, "Figuring Belief," 114.
[101] Glimp, "Figuring Belief," 125.

poem's speakers are able to engage in religious devotion even after they decline into elementally crude matter.

Herbert's own preoccupation with physical frailty, as well as his collection's thematization of the immoral state of humanity, help explain his tendency in his poetry to dwell on situations in which speakers are fraught with the anxieties of physical and mental feebleness. Fittingly, several poems in *The Temple* figure their human sinners as nothing more than a "sillie flie" or "sillie worm."[102] In the poem "Sighs and Grones," for example, the speaker defines the state of humanity in no uncertain terms: "for thou only art / The mighty God, but I a sillie worm" (4-5). Here, the speaker assumes that the basic state of humanity is primitive good, and that difficulties in one's spiritual path can result in further exacerbation of mental and physical decline. For instance, later in this chapter we will see in "Deniall" that language (in one-sided devotional exchange) overworks the speaker's body and cognitive ability until he becomes completely (materially and figuratively) disarticulated.

In "The Forerunners," however, the speaker imagines that language, specifically the ability to create varied utterances, serves as the ultimate intermediary between imperfect humanity and unflinchingly perfect divinity. "The Forerunners" documents one speaker's waking nightmare of reaching old age and losing cognitive function. Ultimately, though, spiritual communion through language—however rudimentary—is left unscathed. The speaker accepts that the loss of higher forms of language is expected

[102] The *OED* entry on "silly" cites Herbert's "Sighs and Grones" as exemplifying one sense of the word ("Of a person or (esp.) an animal: weak, feeble, frail; lacking strength, size, or endurance"). Other possible meanings include "Helpless, defenceless, powerless; frequently with the suggestion of innocence or undeserved suffering," as well as another, more rare form (mostly obsolete by the 17th century) that indicates worthiness, piousness, or holiness.

toward the end of his brief tenure on earth: “True beauty dwells on high: ours is a flame / But borrowed thence to light us thither. / Beauty and beauteous words should go together” (26-28). However, he still grieves the loss of his mental abilities and the senses through the material process of aging, which he describes as the last season of life: “Go, birds of spring: let winter have his fee” (32). Nevertheless, in the end, he still retains one devotional capacity—the ability to repeat “Thou art still my God”—which appears to provide him some comfort.

This one, vestigial devotional sentiment serves as the only exception to the rule in “The Forerunners,” as Herbert’s speaker confronts the fantasy of losing all ability to generate audible speech or use language aside from this specific phrase. The “harbingers,” we are told, have come to shut down the speaker’s cognitive faculties:

> The harbingers are come. See, see their mark:
> White is their color, and behold my head.
> But must they have my brain? Must they dispark
> Those sparkling notions, which therein were bred?
> Must dullness turn me to a clod?
> Yet have they left me, *Thou art still my God* (1-6).

Immediately, the speaker’s invocation to God reveals his anxiety about the material process of aging. Harbingers are signs that signal the approach of something else—literal harbingers run before royal trains or troops and marked the doors of residences to secure lodging for them. In “The Forerunners,” the harbingers are time itself, which leaves a chalky mark (white hairs) on the speaker’s head, which is the “door” of the lodging they claim for old age. The speaker’s imperatives, “See, see their mark” and “behold my

head," denote his anxiety over the visibility of these marks. The titular "forerunners" both signal and precipitate the impending loss of cognitive function and communicative ability, which culminates in the speaker's final form as a seeming clod of dirt or rough stone—a stone, which, mind you, can say "Thou art still my God" on a loop for all of eternity.

Here, Herbert's poetic speaker's situation resembles that of the woman trapped inside the stuffed monkey depicted on *Black Mirror*. Namely, Herbert imagines a version of a devotional subject/himself that he presumes shares his own lyrical ability. Instead of having two pre-recorded options loaded into his options for expression. Herbert's speaker assumes that he will have selected and prepared his own demo tape of sorts; as for God, "He will be pleasèd with that ditty: / And if I please him, I write fine and witty" (11-12). This doomsday jukebox selection of "Thou art still my God" on a loop not only ensures that the speaker continues to "write fine and witty" as long as the message plays, but also essentially locks him into heaven.

However, the fact that the speaker's name is apparently now written into the Book of Life does nothing to mitigate his anxiety around his impending material decline. The speaker's anxiety escalates in a sudden burst of questions, each presuming a necessarily causal function in the last: "But must they have my brain? Must they dispark / Those sparkling notions, which therein were bred? / Must dullness turn me to a clod?" (3-5). The shift in the first question, "But must," denotes a turn in the focus/argument of the poem, in which the speaker becomes anxious about the material effects of old age, which he sees as inextricably linked to the progression of sensory loss and mental breakdown. The force of the turn at "but must…" also evinces a strong sense of frustration and

injustice—the harbingers may bereave the speaker of the physical signs of youth and even of life itself eventually, but the loss of cognitive ability is the final straw. The repetition of "must" in these questions presupposes that the appearance of the harbingers (white hairs) necessitates that these other conditions must follow—first, that time, the harbinger of old age, must take his brain, performing a kind of lobotomy in which it will necessarily "dispark / Those sparkling notions" inside it. The verb "dispark" interestingly means to "divest of the character of a park; to throw open (park-land), or convert (it) to other uses" (*OED*). Due to these connotations of razing a cultivated, enclosed landscape, Herbert's use of "dispark" evokes the violent destruction of living, blooming, thriving organisms. Here, the specific act of making "sparkling" notions dull suggests not a clean removal of the notions themselves, but rather an act of snuffing out their spark and extinguishing their vitality all at once, like razing a field—and, by extension, any access the speaker might have to these mental faculties.

The speaker's phobias culminate in his final vision of becoming a senseless, dull "clod," a material status not mutually exclusive with his own boilerplate expression of devotional subjectivity. Asking "must dullnesse turn me into a clod?", the speaker imagines himself arriving at a state of material redundancy and heaviness. "Clod" could be a deprecating reference to the human body as a mass of "clay" (which echoes Adam's creation story in Genesis) or to a coherent mass or lump of any solid matter, such as earth (*OED*). Such a figuration of the human body's materiality as dull and heavy similarly shows up in Shakespeare's Sonnet 44, in which the poetic speaker laments the distance between himself and his beloved, and the central conceit is the discrepancy between cognition and physical embodiment: "If the dull substance of my flesh were thought, /

Injurious distance should not stop my way" (1-2). Herbert and Shakespeare both contrast the "dull" material of the body with its lighter elements (thought); the sonnet's comparison also sets fire and air opposite to earth and water, and suggests that the heavier the speaker's affect becomes (more tears), the less accessible these lighter elements become.

Given that "dullnesse" is operative in the origin story of this clod, the speaker likely imagines a mass of heavy, earthy matter (human-shaped or not), whose only faculty is to repeat the phrase: "Thou art still my God." This phrase, repeated again twice in the poem, becomes the only comfort afforded the speaker, echoing the conclusion of Herbert's most well-known poem, "The Altar": "…if I chance to hold my peace, / These stones to praise thee may not cease" (13-14). The ability of the dull clod to affirm "Thou art still my God" similarly imagines the act of leaving behind dull, heavy material objects as monuments to God which endlessly praise him, however mechanically and repetitively.[103]

However, while the speaker acknowledges that "sweet phrases, lovely metaphors" (13) and "Louely enchanting language" (19) are seized from this clod, he also argues that these elevated linguistic capabilities are superfluous: "if you go, I passe not; take your way: / For, *Thou art still my God*, is all that ye / Perhaps with more embellishment can say" (31-33). Indeed, language and lofty phrases are figured as being aligned with more

[103] Herbert suggests elsewhere that his poetry could never measure up to God's creation and God's own words. A notable example can be found in "Jordan II," in which the speaker labors fruitlessly over complex metaphors to express devotion through poetry, only to hear God (referred to as "friend" [15]) tell him "there is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd / Copy out only that, and save expense" (17-18). In this example, material reduction does not factor into the speaker's own inadequacy to express God's love, but his status as a vehicle for a simple and singular message parallels that of the speaker of "The Forerunners."

volatile and diseased matter: the speaker accuses language of flying away due to its unpredictability and susceptibility to seduction: “wilt thou leave the Church, and love a stie?” (22). Beautiful words function as gateway drugs into worldly pleasures, which lead “foolish lovers” to “love dung,” a disgusting and undignified excremental vision of worldly material temptations (25). By linking misdirected elevated language to pathologically gross matter, the speaker also distances the homely clod from insidious temptations—however dull, the clod lacks any volatility or propensity to material excess.

As a coherent mass whose elemental makeup and function are both singular, the clod is devoid of excess or anxiety, seeking out nothing. Even the assurance in “Thou art still my God” is confident and self-affirming, and does not require God to respond in any way. Each repetition of the phrase demonstrates a persistence of faith; the necessity of repetition itself does not suggest that God needs this assurance either, but that the clod, like the stones in “The Altar,” endures as an eternal monument. The clod’s one capability is the only necessary one, and this fact comforts the speaker, who also believes it the “best,” even thanking the harbingers after imagining their violent seizure of his brain: “Good men ye be, to leave me my best room, / Ev’n all my heart, and what is lodged there” (7-8). In “Thou art still my God” is the heart in full, and lodged within the heart is this phrase; the two are coextensive, mutual participants in only the barest, most austere model of devotional subjectivity. Thus, what remains in the clod, regardless of form, is decidedly not clod-like in function (although Herbert seems to find a simple purity in clod-like form). The repeated phrase “Thou art still my God” expresses the speaker’s heart’s love and obedience.

But while the speaker-as-clod may be elementally and functionally complete, he is still reduced to a crude material form, and, like *Black Mirror*'s dead mother trapped inside a stuffed monkey this reduction excludes him from providing evidence for his own access to higher forms of thought and language associated with being human. If to "dispark" the vibrant notions in his brain is for dullness to render him a clod, then the poem figures the body as a rude elemental object that just barely retains the brain's capability for thought and language.

However mechanical, the clod's repetition of the phrase "Thou art still my God" suggests it retains one piece of human consciousness, which makes it difficult to categorize the clod as fully non-cognitive. While the shifting or decomposing materiality of the speaker could be seen as a loss of human vitality (which the "dullnesse" of the clod threatens), the speaker-as-clod still demonstrates the devotional ability, that mechanism, that inheres in his heart. A vestige of the speaker's heart remains in the clod after the harbingers have abandoned their siege, but whether or not the clod still understands the sentiment it repeats is unclear. Also unclear is the clod's role in the timing and execution of the utterance "Thou art still my God." This sentiment, which remains unchanged during the metamorphosis from human speaker to clod, expresses the speaker's devotional intent at its core. While the clod is a cruder material vessel for the evidence of devotion, and while "Thou art still my God" serves as an almost universal devotional message, the sentiment is still of the speaker's original choosing and expresses his original intent.

II. “Deniall” and failures of hearing

In her introduction to her 2007 edition of *The Temple*, Helen Wilcox defines the interpersonal contours of the relationships between Herbert’s devotional speakers and God: “The tone of these openings is that of an interested or puzzled individual addressing a wise, patient and loving friend” (xxi). By and large, the emotional overtones of the poems contained within *The Temple* fit the affective rubric of “interested or puzzled” that Wilcox describes, but many poems also exceed this emotional baseline in terms of the relational challenges, lack of reciprocation, and lack of understanding between God and the speaker. These other poems are far more extreme in their figurations of negative emotions, particularly of loss, fear, anxiety, and isolation or estrangement from God; indeed, these distressing and estranging states of humanity are often themselves the orienting or central problem of Herbert’s poems. Richard Rambuss describes one such poem, “Decay,” as exemplifying Herbert’s move to “[turn] almost perversely nostalgic for pre-Christian times long gone by, times when, as he sees it, God was more openly sociable with his human favorites.”[104] The often-unsociable representation of the God of *The Temple* also functions to illustrate God’s inaccessibility within the very space carved out for the purpose of seeking him. Rambuss, in *Closet Devotions*, considers the significance of places and spaces that intensify, enable, and prohibit contact with the divine: “In the space of private devotion there emerges a more reclusive self to search out, scrutinize, and cultivate, something to fret over but also to dote upon.”[105] As he defines it, “Herbert’s seventeenth-century figuration of the closet” then emerges as “a site

[104] Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, 113.
[105] Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, 107.

of immurement, housing both angry God and anxious Christian."[106] Devotion is, in its essence, an act of seeking out another within a space one deems fit for this act, whether or not the other party chooses to participate. For Herbert, social space and auditory space converge in the central problem of "Deniall," which illustrates the often-restrictive and distressing conditions of religious devotion, specifically of unanswered prayers. Similar to Rambuss's figuration of the counterintuitively expansive possibilities offered by the cramped devotional closet, "Deniall" portrays the restriction of auditory space (ability to hear and be heard) as the cause for an emotional implosion and cognitive explosion. The speaker experiences God's denial as an obstruction of his transmission of devotion.

In "Deniall," mental activity in general, particularly any kind of reasoning or inference, depends on the fidelity of an individual's senses and that individual's interpretation of stimuli. Without any stimuli to interpret or even perceive, the central subject of Herbert's "Deniall" frames a cognitive collapse as the logical outcome of sensory deprivation / understimulation. The expectation that his message's sound will reach God instead of bouncing back from the empty walls of the devotional closet ("Therefore my soul lay out of sight") results in a negative feedback loop in which the speaker's ineffective prayers echo out against a backdrop of isolation, which then deprives the speaker of any kind of auditory stimuli (answer) from God, which in turn causes the speaker to offer up even more desperate devotional messages, although these utterances themselves begin to break down in clarity and cohesion.

In "Deniall," Herbert plunges his fictional devotional speaker deep into the metaphorical dungeon of sound deprivation only to emerge out the other end with a poem

[106] Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, 113.

that seemingly repairs itself in terms of rhyme, which fits both form and function given the poem's metaphor of devotion as musical output and its speaker as a literal musical instrument. The restoration of the speaker's heart and spirit, figured here as the restoration of musical range and ability, comes back full circle to underline his occupation in real life: devotional poet. With the rhyming of "chime" with "rhyme," the final two lines of "Deniall" create a resolution to the poem's previous stanzas' unrhymed closings. This final rhyme also suggests a musical resolution, due not only to the use of the specific verb "chime," but also in regard to resolving a melody and chord structure that eventually comes back to the dominant major or minor key. When God's "favors" finally arrive and grant the speaker's needs, they "chime" with his mind, suggesting a collaborative view of musical output. These "favors" figure an imagined sense of harmony between God's grace and the speaker's cognitive faculties. While devotion takes a conversational model and, the speaker argues, must involve two-way hearing (or reception), God's contribution to this conversation is represented as a means by which to not only repair and refine his devotional poetic ability itself, but to elevate it. The verb "chime" rings out as the last musical cue for readers, and it refers to the synthetic properties of lyric and sound. Here, the metaphor does not quite end, but it signals the limits of its own beginnings.

"Deniall" features an opening that immediately questions the function and receptibility of hearing in religious devotion. The speaker's first description of God is of his ears, and these are "silent." How can an ear be silent? Does an ear generate its own sound? With the descriptor "silent," Herbert also raises the question of whether a hearing subject can block sounds by refusing to emit its own sounds. In any case, some force

precludes other sound from penetrating within. The speaker claims it is his "devotions" which have failed to "pierce" God's ears. In this image, the verb "pierce" imagines auditory stimuli as a kind of intruder, but perhaps more like someone seeking entry to asylum or a sanctuary. In an interesting material figuration of the process of prayer, God's "silent ears" refuse the entrance of the speaker's devotion. The borders of God's ears (hypothetical body parts which allegorize both God's omniscience and his frequent inaccessibility) are represented as inviolable. They are "silent"; they do not engage with sound in any way. As a consequence of God's willful disengagement, the speaker experiences a textbook trauma response:

> Then was my heart broken, as was my verse;
> My breast was full of fears
> And disorder. (3-5)

The failure of "disorder" to rhyme with either "verse" or "fears" calls attention to poetic as well as internal, psychological chaos in the speaker's reaction to God's refusal to acknowledge devotional messages. The pairing of heartbreak and broken "verse" signals a breakdown in the ability to process, communicate, and use language more broadly. "Fears" and "disorder" signal a view of the self as fragmented. Rejection and abandonment are, of course, real and common sources of trauma, and here in the poem's opening stanza, God's rejection of the speaker's "devotions" is figured as the orienting problem.

The speaker's catch-all phrase "devotions" seems to function as a fluid descriptor for praise and prayer in the form of lyric, whether that be verse or music. Both types of expression are certainly operative in this poem, given that Herbert explicitly names the

speaker's efforts as "verse" in the first stanza and then goes on to morph his speaker into a jangling, discordant heap of musical instrument parts. Assuming this image allegorizes the cohesion and disintegration of the devotional self, we can assume Herbert recognizes the category of devotion as one that would invariably involve sound.

Indeed, the only line that is repeated in the poem at all stresses the dearth of listening and understanding. The repetition of the final lines in the third and fourth stanzas, "But no hearing," brings all of the speaker's anxiety and fear up to an anti-climax of ultimate futility. "But no hearing" serves as the briefest but most prohibitional endpoint, as if all the speaker's hopes and wishes have propelled him all the way…to an unmoving wall. The future is foreclosed, and the speaker's pleas occupy the category of sunk cost. The miserable refrain of "no hearing" brings the reader's attention back to the orienting problem: silence, or "deniall." "But no hearing" seems to refer to the speaker's own capacity to hear, but also to God's refusal to listen. To "hear," in this sense, in the early modern devotional imagination, inherently means that a social exchange must take place. Early modern usage of the verb "hear," especially in religious and scriptural contexts, often denotes a willful act of listening and not merely the ability to perceive sound. The *OED* gives one primary definition of "to hear" as "To exercise the auditory function intentionally; to give ear, hearken, listen," and one of the subordinate usages of this sense as "To listen to with compliance or assent; to accede to, grant (a request or prayer). Chiefly in scriptural use" (*OED* citation). While Herbert does not grant us access to information about what that request is, if it even has specific content besides the desire for reassurance, the important thing seems to be that God will not grant it. For God to

"hear" the speaker's request then, it follows that some kind of favorable response or sign of grace must manifest before the speaker.

Herbert figures the dispersal and collapse of cognitive function as a natural consequence of God's refusal to "hear" the speaker's prayer:

> My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,
>
> Did fly asunder:
>
> Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
>
> Some to the wars and thunder
>
> Of alarms. (6-10)

In this metaphor, the speaker's "bent thoughts" (suggesting a mental and emotional inability to produce ideas as a "straight shooter") issue from his disordered mind, and, like a "brittle bow" and the arrows it would shoot, these thoughts fly about ineffectively, lacking sufficient range, clear direction, or intention. The destinations of the thoughts are clearly divided into two extremes within the realm of human experience: "pleasures" entail sinful worldly hedonism, while wars and "thunder / of alarms" indicate duty as well as chaos and violence more generally. The factor unifying these opposed poles is their relationship to aural stimuli. When the speaker is confronted again and again with "no hearing" from God, then he becomes preoccupied with any source of sound, to any place where sound feels at home and is readily received. God's denial of the speaker's thoughts causes them to "fly" chaotically about. In the metaphor of the "brittle bow," the speaker's notion of an excess of thought denotes thought's volatility and mobility, which represents human thought as impeding rather than enabling devotion. The movement of the thoughts toward "pleasures" is one that is naturalized in religious writings as a

characteristic sinner's move. "Alarms" closes out another unrhymed and unsettled stanza. The simultaneous flight to the sound of "alarms" suggests a self-destructive, almost hedonistic desire for auditory information, whether or not that information is useful, positive, or even linguistic or coherent in nature. Hence, the "alarms" come to function like a foghorn that drowns out the surrounding silence and isolation. Herbert's speaker stands at the edge of the dock, soaking it all in indiscriminately.

The speaker's cognitive overflow is figured as an involuntary rushing forth, and the next stanza of the poem offers the perspective of these "bent thoughts" themselves:

> "As good go anywhere," they say,
> "As to benumb
> Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
> Come, come, my God, O come!
> But no hearing." (11-15)

The *OED* provides two possible usages of "benumb": 1. transitive. To make (any part of the body) insensible, torpid, or powerless; occasionally to stupefy or stun, as by a blow or shock; but now mostly used of the effects of cold, and 2. To render (the mental powers, the will, or the feelings) senseless or inert; to stupefy, deaden. In "Deniall," the first usage seems more straightforwardly applicable, since his line uses the verb "benumb" in transitive form. However, I mention both senses of the word here because the alternative interpretation, relating more to cognition than to physical capabilities, signifies something more complex within the limits of Herbert's larger social and phenomenological observations. Both uses stress the vacancy of coherent thought or function, and both also feature some sense of "benumb" as "stupefy," a word which we in our present time can

more readily perceive as denoting the confluence of sense perception and cognition more generally. Something that is "stupefied" is blocked and slowed down. Both "knees and heart" are rendered senseless in terms of their perceptual void and in terms of the use and purpose of these bodily organs. The pairing of "knees" and "heart" as focal points of debilitation bring together issues of desperation (begging on one's knees) and extreme vulnerability (begging for love from the only one who can give it to you).

In reaction to God's act of distancing himself from the speaker's devotions, the speaker represents his cognitive faculties as both damaged and eager to escape the socially unfulfilling space of devotion. The speaker's thoughts abandon him to seek out other sources of sensory input, whether from worldly pleasures or from war and "alarms" (8-10). The thoughts may "as good go anywhere… as to benumb / Both knees and heart, in crying night and day, / Come, come, my God, O come!" (11-12). At least in the case of the knee, the speaker's loss of physical sensation is a direct effect of an excess of thought, which creates an excess of emotion. The inefficacy of this crying results in a painful cycle: the speaker's body and heart, both prostrate, release more "arrows" of devotion which fail to pierce God's ears ("but no hearing" [15]), and this failure desensitizes both heart and knee.

The breakdown in communication channels between the speaker and God, which is experienced as an internal struggle for connection, becomes externalized to the speaker's body, which begins to echo this process of disintegration. Noticing his own material decline, the speaker's complaints return to the site recognized by early moderns as the very origin of man, and his lament underscores the inefficiency of God's design choices:

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue

To cry to thee,

And then not hear it crying! All day long

My heart was in my knee,

But no hearing. (16-20)

Before disintegrating into an incoherent pile of matter, the speaker identifies with Adam's creation in Genesis, as mere "dust" that God animates with the capacity for thought and language. When this tongue is ineffective, however, God's gift becomes cruel and ironic—the very capability for prayer given to the speaker also occasions God's rejection of prayer. By claiming "my heart was in my knee," the speaker demonstrates the sincerity of his prostration, but this phrasing also registers as literal given his self-identification as dust. As his devotional capacity dwindles, he collapses into a heap in which all parts (including his heart and knee) converge, as he languishes before a God whose ears are impenetrable and who chooses not to acknowledge or grant his supplications.

The speaker's focus on the bare status of himself as "dust," evoking the creation of Adam in Genesis, serves to further distance him from the community and closeness that he aims to attain through devotion. Herbert's return to the creation story emphasizes not only the natural state of humanity commencing from its creation, but also reveals his view of his own elemental matter. The speaker is incredulous that God would commit to such a design choice "And then not hear" the resulting sounds of suffering. God's refusal to hear the speaker's prayers causes him, again, to bring up the relationship between his heart and his knee, and in this model, the two are no longer working in tandem. Rather,

"My heart was in my knee" implies that these faculties are no longer operating alongside one another anymore, but have now been collapsed into one another due to the disorienting and disintegrating effects of one-sided devotion. Specifically, the speaker's heart is represented as dislocated and collapsed into his knee, the part of the body that must support all of his weight in a state of desperation.

In this moment, the speaker's image of himself disintegrating invokes a musical instrument that is physically falling apart, in which all the parts that are supposed to function together to make a pleasing sound are driven out of their rightful positions and are just barely hanging on to the whole. The final two stanzas of the poem turn to its inevitable conclusion, which figures the pitiful speaker as damaged due to neglect and his own distress:

> Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
> Untuned, unstrung:
> My feeble spirit, unable to look right,
> Like a nipped blossom, hung
> Discontented. (21-25)

With "therefore," the turn in this stanza is decidedly logical. The pile-up of "no hearing" culminates in an image of something cut off or bent out of shape. Now, the speaker's soul lies "out of sight," like a dusty violin that someone did not have enough time, love, or inclination to repair. The image of a "nipped" blossom indicates the termination of future potential / vitality; within the lack of sound there is a sense of death or abandonment or lifelessness or isolation or all of the above. The soul, "like a nipped blossom, hung," and hanging implies a useless or impotent view of the self. The word "nipped" indicates

something (usually a plant) that has been pinched and withered, which prevents its growth and extension. Spiritual flourishing is curtailed by external forces or events beyond one's own control, but the speaker's own flaccid spirit is nevertheless a source of shame. His spirit is "unable to look right": interestingly, in this metaphor, the speaker's spiritual vision and his physical range of motion have both been restricted by disuse. Because God has not chosen to bend his ear to the sounds, the sounds themselves have become increasingly discordant and muddled, and the speaker can no longer even convey the message that he wants, which particularly devastates a speaker who could represent, to Herbert, a poet like himself.

"Deniall" makes the case that auditory communication in devotion, when experienced both by the devotional speaker themselves and by God, acts as a restorative and nourishing force for the human spirit. The speaker's ultimate request to God is to be healed holistically in order to restore the normal channels of spiritual communication. Herbert's language in the final stanza is more optimistic than it is in the earlier stanzas, and here he seems to make a full return to the occupation of lyric poetry rather than musical accompaniment:

> O cheer and tune my heartless breast,
> Defer no time;
> That so thy favors granting my request,
> They and my mind may chime,
> And mend my rhyme. (26-30)

The speaker requests for God to "cheer and tune" his "heartless breast," which signals an act of restoration, or at least one of routine maintenance. God is the tuner of the speaker's

spirit (his figurative lute). The speaker's ruined heart (here, a metonym for his emotional state; a broken spirit) can only be healed by God. That the speaker ends with the hopeful possibility that God will "mend [his] rhyme" stresses the importance of his verse, indicating the significance of his occupation within his view of himself as a fully functioning, human being. The choice of the verb "mend" evokes both a sense of urgency ("Defer no time") for the act of repair and a sense that the repair will take place from the inside out, restoring cognitive and emotional balance, since the speaker's "rhyme" is what God would mend in this image.

In order for the speaker's devotion to become coherent again, so must his "untuned, unstrung" soul and mind (22, 29). But both are recoverable only if he is still capable of successfully obtaining God's help, either through his "rhyme," tuneless devotion, or his pitiful condition. Whatever imperfect capacity remains, he believes that God can choose to listen and help him, and this belief inheres in even the heap of dust, the most disjointed and dis-articulate form he inhabits. In the request he makes in these lines, the speaker relies on God to hear his still-human devotion. The end of the poem is inconclusive; the speaker still appears to be waiting, but the poem itself also stands as proof against his complete disarticulation. Additionally, the final return to a cohesive rhyme structure suggests that some form of healing or consolation (whether internal or due to God's grace) has already helped the speaker to rearticulate himself and the structure of his poem.

"Deniall" makes the somewhat disheartening contention (in the speaker's words, "tune my heartless breast") that the capacities for human oral communication and hearing are unstable and unreliable ways of reaching God. For the speaker of the poem, human

sentience both enables communication with and intensifies isolation from God from the outset—God's rejection is represented as sensory deprivation, and the speaker feels his resulting spiritual disorder materially. The process of becoming a dull or disarticulate material thing itself is one God imposes upon the speaker with his titular rejection. As a result, the speaker falls to material disarticulation; he loses sensation and bodily capability and becomes a heap of dust. This disarticulation follows an excess of thoughts and expressions of devotion, which are nevertheless unable to reach God.

In *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, Smith includes a chapter titled simply "Membering." In it, he connects the idea of the physical extension and articulation of the body to the perception of sound and all its social and subjective forces. The process he describes as "voicing" (which means engaging or emitting sound), he notes, demonstrates the difficulty of assigning the act of speaking and emitting sound to one specific major part of the body:

> Torso, neck, head: speaking engages three of the body's major members. (In most cultures it also involves the arms and hands, if not the feet and legs.) Seeing, by contrast, engages only the neck and head. In that respect, seeing is more readily locatable in the body than voicing is, just as the objects it attends to are more locatable in space than sounds are… Not all sounds are located in the body in quite the same place.[107]

Smith demonstrates that, like the auditory stimuli that surrounds the body, the act of producing an utterance cannot always be traced back to any specific site within the body. "Deniall" stages this ambiguity by having its speaker's heart and knee collapse in

[107] Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, 98.

tandem. However, what if the effects of understimulation also served as the symptoms of a larger crisis in the body's sense of its own members and locations? In particular, what if eyesight were not so readily locatable? My next chapter, "Ocular Dispossession and the Sociality of Shame in *Samson Agonistes*," explores questions like these, in one fictional subject's experience of blindness becomes the occasion for interrogating the eye's function and fixity. Milton connects visual impairment as a form of understimulation to the potential of the eye to restore a nation's hero, destroy an entire community, or both.

IV:

OCULAR DISPOSSESSION AND THE SOCIALITY OF SHAME IN *SAMSON AGONISTES*

In John Milton's tragic closet drama *Samson Agonistes*, the Chorus approaches the distressed Samson and offers a curious description of his appearance: "see how he lies at random, carelessly diffused" (117).[108] By the seventeenth century, the meanings of "diffuse" include: dispersed over a large area; difficult to understand due to ambiguity, complexity, or confusion; or, in medical discourse, "a pathological process: not restricted to a single organ or part of the body; widespread" (*OED*, "diffuse, *adj*.," 2.b).[109] The final definition would suggest that Samson's torment resists being confined to any one category or physical condition, such as the loss of his eyes, his captivity, his "shameful garrulity" to a woman, his lust, or his feeling of lost spiritual potential. The Chorus's description of Samson as *diffused* is well-represented in much of the criticism on *Samson Agonistes*. The play's interpretive ambiguity, Samson's mysterious "rousing motions" at the end, and the tensions between inner and outer regeneration all have inspired readings of the play's themes, characters, and events as difficult to categorize—such as is suggested by one definition of "diffuse."[110]

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[108] All line numbers for *Samson Agonistes* taken from John Milton, *The Major Works including Paradise Lost*, edited by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[109] Milton uses "diffuse" a third way in his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, indicating "Esp. of knowledge or learning: extensive, comprehensive; diverse. rare before late 19th cent. "Men…of eminent spirit and breeding joyn'd with a diffuse and various knowledge of divine and human things" (*OED*, "diffuse, *adj*.," 2.c). 1644 Milton *Doctr. Divorce* (ed. 2) To Parl. sig. A4

[110] Some critics comment on *Samson Agonistes*' ambiguity both in terms of Samson's experience and his characterization as the protagonist of a generally ambiguous play. Fish and Wittreich both occupy this ambiguity productively, reading the problem with interpretation in *Samson Agonistes* both as staged in Samson's view and as exemplified in *Samson Agonistes* as a literary text. In *Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes*, Wittreich offers a rigorous (re)interrogation of the tensions between more traditional and

I contend that this notion of diffusion also sheds light on Samson's ontological questions about the body's capabilities, which explore the ways in which sight and strength might work more ambiguously and resist definitions of bodily faculties as the organs that underwrite them. Samson's disordered state stems not only from his blindness—and his belief that his strength is useless because of it—but also from his recognition that sight and strength are tenuous possessions, causing him to question the purpose and design of his body's faculties. Indeed, Milton foregrounds Samson's crisis around the body's limitations, mentioning the blindness and weakness in the first sentence of the play's Argument: "Samson made captive, blind … comes forth … to sit a while and bemoan his condition" (672). Milton begins the Argument with the past participles "made captive" and "blind," which then assert thematic and causal primacy all other conditions and acts the Argument describes. Samson's tragic affect may register spiritual guilt, but it is the loss of his physical capabilities that provides both the occasion for and the content as he "bemoan[s] his condition."

Samson's experience of sensory deprivation has consequences for the play's view of sociality as well. Eleanor Brown writes that the rhetorical effect of the Chorus's first speech is to "distance and objectify the hero," demonstrating that, from the beginning, outside perspectives on Samson's suffering highlight Samson's "diffused" state (95). Indeed, in the social landscape of *Samson Agonistes*, Samson is represented as a spectacle of human affliction before the other characters due to his blindness and enslavement at the hands of the Philistines. Additionally, the play's other characters describe him in

conservative "regeneratist" accounts of Samson (as a tragic hero who rises again to save the day), and those countering them to read the ambiguity of Samson as part of its functional vision of action and interpretation itself.

these terms. As we have seen, in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta*, sensory overstimulation in the form of disgusting smells results in a positive social outcome for the Jewish protagonists; they are able to exercise agency by isolating themselves from odorous Christians. *Samson Agonistes* represents the other side of the spectrum, where the lack of perceptive ability (in this case, Samson's blindness) is linked to an absence of social agency. Specifically, the loss of sensory stimuli has the unexpected result of social disruption and loss of ability to actively and willingly control one's participation in social life. For Samson, the loss of social agency consists of the inability to penetrate others through the power of the gaze, all while he himself is surrounded by a literal Chorus of gazes. The play's introductory Argument presents Samson as socially immersed, surrounded "by certain friends and equals of his tribe, which make the Chorus, who seek to comfort him what they can." However, the Argument belies the fact that, while Samson is surrounded by other people, their presence does nothing to soothe his torment, and in fact further objectifies him. His blindness and concomitant misery render him a spectacle before other characters in the play, exacerbating his feelings of shame while enslaved by the Philistines. Samson's shame is largely self-inflicted. Along with the shame of losing his eyesight and strength, he internalizes his disclosure of the secret of his strength "weakly to a woman" as well as the fact that his countrymen (the Chorus and Manoa) witness him in his lowest state (50). Shame in *Samson Agonistes* limits the range of available social possibilities and cuts off hope for a social future.

Given Milton's own blindness and his works' various meditations on sight—including Michael's removal of the film on Adam's eyes in Book IX of *Paradise Lost* and the reflections on blindness in his poem "When I Consider How My Light is

Spent"—it is surprising that few critical accounts sustain a reading of how *Samson Agonistes* might animate, complicate, or depart from Milton's representations of his own blindness.[111] In the only analysis of Samson's blindness to date that is informed by disability studies, Susannah Mintz argues that the critical focus on blindness as both physical fact and a metaphor for moral lapse distracts from *Samson*'s emphasis on other forms of sense perception "equally important to the interaction of knowledge, subjectivity, and ideology."[112] Mintz's emphasis on the play's treatment of the senses is rare, but even rarer are discussions of the play's representation of the senses themselves. Thomas Gorman begins to approach this question when he notes the "inequity between [Samson's] wisdom and his strength" as the limit of human "sense."[113] Nevertheless, his and other scholars' readings of the play's representations of senses and sensations ultimately focus more on their possible spiritual teleology. While scholarship on Samson's bodily experience as interaction with the physical world is sparse, most work, in some measure, touches on Samson's spiritual experience of the relationship between captivity, blindness, and the intelligibility of divine instruction.[114] Thus, questions about

[111] While it is not uncommon for critics to briefly relate Samson's blindness to Milton's, few accounts sustain a reading of the play that refracts the experience of a blind protagonist through that of his blind creator. Eleanor Brown offers the first and only extensive treatment of Milton's blindness, situating his disability in an archive of historical evidence, contemporary attitudes toward blindness, and references to blindness in his own poetry, including *Samson Agonistes*. In his article "With Mortal Voice: Milton Defends Against the Muse," Stanley Fish reads Milton's fear of blindness as emblematic of deeper psychological fears, specifically that of castration anxiety. In Fish's view, blindness to Milton represents "the dread of being rendered powerless, of losing agency, of being unmanned" (516). More recently, Ross Lerner reads Milton's earlier poems to relate his status as a "poet in crisis" who encounters his own weakness and paralysis, an approach that "allows us to take Milton's later identification with—and, as I have argued, his transformation of—the Pauline emphasis on embracing weakness as a mode of poetic and autobiographical reflection even before his blindness" (120).

[112] Mintz, Susannah B. "Dalila's Touch: Disability and Recognition in *Samson Agonistes*." *Milton Studies 40* (2002); 150-80, 153.

[113] Gorman, Thomas M. "The Reach of Human Sense: Surplus and Absence in *Samson Agonistes*." *Milton Studies* 39, (2000): 184-215, 185.

[114] See Shohet, Lauren. "Reading History with *Samson Agonistes*." *Milton Studies* 41 (2002): 94-116; Netzley, Ryan. "Reading Events: The Value of Reading and the Possibilities of Political Action and

the literal signification of perception and bodily ability are commonly subordinated allegorically to discussions of spirituality. It seems to me that scholarship on *Samson*—and on Milton more broadly—is overdue for an examination of how physical blindness and disability work literally and thematically, which could help us understand how Milton enacts or avoids enacting his own beliefs about the lived experience of blindness and the role literature plays in its interpretation or thematization in characters.

Such a focus on the play's represented ontological structures of blindness and physical weakness presents us with a fuller, more nuanced portrait of Samson's characterization as a disabled figure wholly separate from the author who wrote him, rather than viewing him as an allegorical figure for Milton himself due to the simple fact that Samson is a blind protagonist. Given the complex and still-evolving status of early modern disability studies, along with the relatively sparse criticism on categories of identity in *Samson Agonistes* other than religious or political identity, my chapter advances an argument that draws on an important work in disability studies. In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, authors David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder propose the concept of "narrative prosthesis," defined as the tendency of authors to represent disability as something that needs to be overcome and to supplement (or act as "prosthesis" for) narratives that hinge on disability. As Mitchell and Snyder point out, the relatively frequent representations of disability in literature (as compared historically with those of other marginalized identities) nevertheless typically take as their premise the "normal" body, a frame that "fails to consider the contingencies of bodies functioning within specific social and historical context. It is, in other words, a

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Criticism in *Samson Agonistes*." *Criticism* 48, no. 4 (2006): 509-553; and Lieb, Michael. "'Our Living Dread': The God of *Samson Agonistes*." *Milton Studies* 33 (1997): 3-25.

body divorced of time and space— a thoroughly artificial affair."[115] "Narrative prosthesis" concerns itself with the ways in which

> the ruse of prosthesis fails in its primary objective: to return the incomplete body to the invisible status of a normative essence… works… tend to leave the wound of disability undressed so to speak. Its presence is enunciated as transgressive in that literary works often leave the disabled body as a troubled and troubling position within culture.[116] (8)

Such failures of prosthesis support Mitchell and Snyder's argument that disability in literature has historically existed in a primarily artificial relation to the "real" concerns of a text, and is rarely if ever engaged as such.

I want to suggest that the relationship between narrative and disability provides the occasion for a more literal kind of "narrative prosthesis." In the case of a blind poet like John Milton, whose admiration of the careers of other blind poets such as Homer often prompts him to identify with or mimic them in his works, we may be able to see a more basic, reappropriated type of "prosthesis" in which he employs Samson's blindness to reach for possibilities of divine restoration and hope for the return of bodily capabilities one assumes were permanently lost. Essentially, Milton's reverence for the careers of blind poets could make a case that the Samson story functions as "prosthesis" for Milton's own blindness. Such a view would assume that Milton actually uses Samson's narrative to supplement or repossess a relationship with the world (via the word) that is limited because of his blindness. However, I aim to challenge and

[115] Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, 7.
[116] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 8.

complicate the view that the representation of Samson's blindness functions primarily to empower or gratify his blind author through the imaginative power of narrative. I suggest that *Samson Agonistes* bodies forth Samson's experience of physical disability; it not only represents blindness and weakness as ontologically complex and subjective, but also questions the experience of disability in its own right.

A reading of Samson's disability as "prosthesis" does not adequately recognize Samson's representation as a character who not only has a disability but also articulates a complex subjectivity shaped by his loss of strength and his blindness in concert. The Biblical Samson story is a well-known one, but only Milton chooses to represent Samson's strength as essentially *lodged* in his hair. In its inverse but also analogous construction of eyesight, Milton's adaptation is also the only one that fantasizes sight as potentially not located in the eyes. Samson questions the divine design of perception, asking about why capacities are placed in finite locations—why eyesight should be bound to one body part or strength so easily lost along with his hair. From his lament about the oppressive "void of corporeal sense" (616) to the "rousing motions" of indeterminate origin (1382), Samson's loss of sight and strength serves as the impetus to an inner dialogue that grapples with the functions, locations, and security of sense and bodily capabilities more broadly. In this chapter, I show that *Samson Agonistes* registers the senses as ontologically fluid, chafing against models of the body's capabilities that locate them in determinate physical sites. Milton's depiction of the complexity and ambiguity of Samson's experience of disability itself thus shows his character working as more than literary "prosthesis" whose end goal is to structure his author's identification or using his disability as a badge that signifies something else.

Few critics touch on *Samson*'s representation of bodily sensations themselves as concepts up for debate. In important exceptions, Elizabeth Harvey and Drew Daniel have contributed much-needed attention to questions of corporeality and affect in the text. Harvey's account stresses the play's illumination of the indeterminate limits between Samson's physical and psychological interiority, while Daniel's work connects affect directly to material sensations. Harvey traces the space between the "physicality of Samson's 'incorporate' flesh and the operations of the mind's inwardness," reading the play as "anatomiz[ing]" this liminal space.[117] Daniel, in turn, reads Samson's affect as melancholic humors coursing through his psyche, arguing that the "rousing motions" he feels originate from emotions physically contained in the melancholic body.[118] These critics offer much-needed commentary on the play's intertwining of affect and sensation, a relationship displayed in a particularly salient way by Samson's sudden renewal of courage, which he attributes to the "rousing motions" that impel him to enter and destroy the temple. Both touch on the ambiguity of being "moved" by interior and exterior forces invoked by Samson's interior "motions." In the infamous moment when Samson apparently regains his strength and with it a newfound resolve to destroy the Philistines' temple, he uses vocabularies of thinking and feeling in tandem: "Be of good courage, I begin to feel / Some rousing motions in me which dispose / To something extraordinary my thoughts" (1381-83). These sensations play on the period's use of "motion" both as

[117] Harvey, Elizabeth. "*Samson Agonistes* and Milton's Sensible Ethics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, edited by Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith, 649-668. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 650.

[118] Stanley Fish argues that there is no necessary link between Samson's spiritual regeneration (provoked by "rousing motions") and his act of knocking down the temple, asserting that there is no formula that directly supports a cause-and-effect relationship between any kind of spiritual change and Samson's act of destruction (See Fish, "Spectacle and Evidence in *Samson Agonistes*." *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (1989) 556-586.).

physical exertion and as being overcome by emotion. *Samson* registers this ambiguity by representing these "rousing motions" as sensations that both lift Samson's spirits and fortify his body. Importantly, as Harvey points out, he also describes the event in terms of his mentality—as a direct source of inspiration for his final act. Samson treats his "rousing motions" as having spiritual and philosophical significance as well as effecting physical and emotional change, which calls attention to the importance of precision in studying the language he uses to refer to his disability more broadly.

While the "rousing motions" Samson feels evoke the intersection between affect and bodily sensation, other speculative and ambiguous references to bodily sensation—often meditating on his loss of sight or its resulting restriction of his access to his strength—are also worth our attention. In addition to preceding the "rousing motions" themselves, these other sensations operate in similar phenomenological space; that is, they toe the line between changes in an individual's physical and emotional states. I would suggest that Samson's experiences of corporeal capability actually *de*-"anatomize" such capability, if we take "anatomize" as restriction to or singular determination of a single organ as the means for a given bodily faculty. Even while he laments its physical fact, Samson questions the determinacy and fixity of blindness, asking why sight should necessarily be "confined" to the physical eyeball alone. Samson's explorations of these ambiguities register more than delirium or unproductive trails of thought; rather, his invention of new images and models representing bodily sense explore sense's possible futurity in his mind, a realm within which he can *feel* these possibilities. Describing his ideal model of sense perception as physically "through all parts diffus'd," Samson finds relief from his mental and physical torture, however intermittent, from imagining a more

dispersed model of bodily capabilities—how sense works and where strength originates (96).

Samson laments the loss of sight and strength, both confined to a particular bodily site—in the case of his divinely ordained strength, confinement to a body part is both literal and applies to no one else in the universe. The Chorus reminds us of Samson's unique, isolating position, drawing attention to both the source and sheer scale of his strength: "For never was from Heaven imparted / Measure of strength so great to mortal seed" (1438-39). Their speech stresses the fact that Samson not only possesses a special relationship to God because of the divine gift of strength, but also remains singular on Earth due to its unparalleled degree. Emily Wilson, who sees Samson's loss of strength as a primary cause of his "tragic overliving," notes that

> Samson's emotional agony is largely the result of his intellectual bewilderment. He cannot understand his own contradictory roles, and God's apparently contradictory purposes toward him. The sense of overliving is associated with doubt and puzzlement about God's timing.[119]

If Samson's agony is intimately linked with the loss of physical sense, it is also linked with his resulting inability to make affective and epistemological judgments about the world. The two sections that follow outline Samson's views of perceptive ability and his position in the play's social landscape, respectively. The first discusses the way that Samson's inner dialogue acts as self-consolation through its imagination of a diffuse notion of sense: that his capacity for sight could be dispersed throughout his body. Additionally, his imagination works with his physical torment in a way that breaks down

[119] Wilson, Emily R. *Mocked with Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 153.

the categories of corporeal and incorporeal anguish. Ultimately, Samson's speculative design for the mechanics of sense perception testifies to the intricacy of his character's subjectivity, challenging the view that his disability functions to represent Milton himself or to allegorize spiritual digression. The second section examines the representation of sociality in the play, specifically focusing on Samson's sense of shame and its relationship to sensory deprivation. *Samson Agonistes* asserts that loss of sense perception in turn leads to loss of control over the extent to which one participates—as well as how one is perceived—in social contexts. Finally, I return to the notion of "narrative prosthesis," outlining the implications of reading disability as more than a narrative device for studies of *Samson Agonistes* and Milton's works more broadly. Such a reading offers scholars and historians new directions for studies of disability as a modality of both affect theory and theories of sense perception.

I. Ocular dispossession and the function of the eye

Many of the sources and opinions that were available to Milton attest that early modern conversations around eyesight were fraught with anxieties about losing it. For early moderns, it was not uncommon for the eye to be regarded as both the determinate location of sight and a sensitive organ in its own right, as described in widely influential philosophy and contemporary scientific treatises of the time. In *De Anima*, still highly influential in early modern theories of anatomy and sense-perception, Aristotle claims: "each sense… is relative to its particular group of sensible qualities: it is found in a sense-organ as such."[120] Sight, bound to the eye, relates what can be seen using that specific

[120] Aristotle. *Parva Naturalia*. Edited by W. D. (William David) Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000,186.

sense organ. In *Microcosmographia* (1615), an influential anatomical treatise authored by court physician Helkiah Crooke, Crooke asserts both the primacy and "precious" quality of the eyes: "The first of the Senses is the Eye the most precious part of the body," emphasizing the eyes' location in the head.[121] This placement functions to provide the eyes "the highest and best defensed place of the body."[122] Additionally, the eyes' surrounding bones, brows, eyelids, and eyelashes work in concert to secure their safety. What Crooke sees as the eye's fortress—its enclosure, its "highest and best" protection from harm as a vulnerable ball, Samson sees as its exposure to risk, claiming that the anatomical constrictions of sight are what make it "obnoxious," that is, exposed to harm (*OED*, "obnoxious, *adj*," 1.a)—a use that Milton is particularly fond of.[123]

The vulnerability of the eyeball—and the consequent concomitant precarity of vision—inspire Samson's odd paradigm of vision as scattered rather than circumscribed to one sight-organ. Samson's ruminations on sensory dispersal are not unique to Milton's play. Ideas supporting the dispersal of broad sites of sensory experience were not uncommon in early modern philosophy. Despite the prevalence of anatomical and medical treatises that categorized or "hacked" bodies to pieces and categorical parts, sense and sensation were not always "anatomized"—or localized—in terms of their

[121] Crooke, Helkiah. *Microcosmographia*. London: W. Iaggard, 1616.*Early English Books Online*, 530.
[122] Crooke, *Microcosmographia,* 536.
[123] Milton uses "obnoxious" to mean "at risk" three times in Paradise Lost. The first instance can be found in Book VI and describes the angels warring with the demons as resilient: "in fight they stood / Unwearied, unobnoxious to be pained / By wound, though from their place by violence moved" (VI.403-404). The second mention occurs at the beginning of Book IX, in which Milton's speaker criticizes the upstart Satan: "As high he soared; obnoxious, first or last, / To basest things" (IX.170-71). The final reference occurs in Book IX in Adam's request to Eve that they cover their nakedness, the parts that "seem most / To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seen" (IX. 1093-94).

function and location in the body.[124] Early moderns believed in the (originally Aristotelian) "common sense" (or *sensus communis*), usually assumed to mean several senses working in concert, that accounts for all of the indirect information garnered through the exercise of the five senses on a given object.[125] There is no "special sense-organ for the common sensibles," but they are instead perceived "incidentally through this or that special sense, e.g. movement, rest, figure, magnitude, number, unity."[126] In *Microcosmographia,* Crooke locates the brain as the site of this "common sense": "we determine the vse of the braine to be… a habitation for the soule … as well [as functions] that are principall as also those of sense and motion."[127] Both Aristotle and Crooke imagine the *sensus communis* operating in a liminal space between multiple fully functional senses.

However, in order for multiple senses to work in concert as a "common sense" for Samson, all of his individual senses would have to be intact. Instead, sight is absent for Samson, and this absence spurs more than just a meditation on blindness itself. Samson's interrogation of weakness and blindness in concert—both physical disabilities when viewed in contrast to his state pre-captivity—carves out a space for what we might think of as a "negative common sense" that inverts the *sensus communis*. That is, Samson imagines the twofold impairments (loss of stimuli and capability) of blindness and weakness as interdependent. The lack of capability and the lack of stimuli work together to further intensify the absence of sense. Additionally, "negative common sense" as a

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[124] See Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned* (New York: Routledge): 1996, and David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in* Parts*: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
[125] The *common sense* is later taken up by Rene Descartes in several works, first in the *Discourse on Method*, *Meditations*, and later in *The Passions of the Soul*, less critically.
[126] Aristotle. *Parva Naturalia*, 218.
[127] Crooke, *Microcosmographia,* 472.

form of torment also deviates from the *sensus communis* in that it is not localized to any part of the body or brain. Between the loss of sight and his perceived loss of strength through the limitations placed on its access by blindness, Samson experiences a deeper and more mysterious "sense" of the purpose of his physical existence. The affective weight of the losses of sight and strength often intertwine in Samson's complaints about his physical state, forging an interior site for the ontological questions he explores: why should visual perception work in such a physically vulnerable manner? And why should strength, however divinely ordained and amplified, operate in such a similarly precarious fashion for him specifically?

Not only does Samson question the capability of his senses, but also why they, as interfaces between his body and the world should operate in distinct bodily sites instead of in a "diffused" way throughout his body. Decrying the fact that only the eye contains the potential for sight, Samson wonders why he might not see out of every pore of his body instead, a model of sense that more closely resembles touch:

> why was the sight
> To such a tender ball as the eye confined?
> So obvious and so easy to be quenched,
> And not as feeling through all parts diffused,
> That she might look at will through every pore? (93-97)

Gendered female, like Dalila, sight feels frustratingly delicate and unreliable, and his control over its capabilities equally tenuous. Figuring the "tender ball" of the eye as a kind of prison for "the sight" as its singular prisoner, Samson's complaint stages the impossibility of extending sight beyond the eyeball—an impossibility that also applies to

the inverse act. The eye, "so obvious and so easy to be quenched," contains all hope for sight, and not only as anatomical fact; sight's futurity, its safety and continuation, requires that the eyes remain functional and physically intact. Samson desires sight to look "at will through every pore," maximizing the functional potentiality of sight regardless of whatever bodily injury or loss that might befall him.

Along with its dispersal of sensory certainty, Samson's diffused model of sight registers another type of ambiguity: for sight to look "at will through every pore," would every pore be able to look at once? Or would sight be "awakened" by the presence of stimuli in any given direction, according to its visual proximity or import? How would this proximity or import be determined? For every pore in Samson's body to look around whenever it wills, it must no longer be contained in discrete, separate objects, since a less restrictive model of sight already excludes a restrictively located "tender ball." Instead, Samson may imagine a network of sight resembling the nervous system the pores can open and shut at will. Alternatively, he might picture dispersed eyeballs, or a set that flocks to areas of the body "at will." It is this type of sight that Ovid describes as enabling the mighty Argus an effective watchman for Hera; because of his "hundred eyes… whatsoever way he stood he looked."[128] However bizarre the image his speech conjures up, Samson finds a kind of security in dispersed sight—if were "through all parts diffused," rather than restricted to the eye, sight could meet visible things at any and all directions.

However optimistic the idea of diffused sight feels for Samson, it offers only a

[128] Argus also resembles Samson in his great strength. While it is unclear whether Milton had this particular figure in mind, Argus's perpetual watchfulness could serve as another ideal for Samson in that, if he had not fallen asleep, Dalila would not have occasion to cut his hair and allow the Philistines to seize him.

brief distraction from the knowledge that blindness and weakness operate on each other, exacting a never-ending cycle of torment with further debilitating effects on his mind. The Chorus describes blindness and captivity as eternally co-constitutive of the structure of Samson's suffering:

> Which shall I first bewail,
>
> Thy bondage or lost sight,
>
> Prison within prison
>
> Inseparably dark? (151-154)

Bondage due to weakness and blindness are here figured as interdependent; the phrase "prison within prison" stages a kind of meta-imprisonment, the perpetual enclosure of each torment within the other. Which prison is the outermost one, which the innermost? It does not seem to matter, since they are "inseparably dark"—their oppressive functions and powers indistinguishable, their limitations coextensive, each experience recursively embedded in the other. A surprisingly similar cyclical model of the loss or incapacitation of sense cycle is described in *Micrographia*, Robert Hooke's 1665 scientific treatise on the features of different objects through the lens of the newly invented microscope. Hooke suggests that thought suffers when any one physical sense does:

> So many are the links, upon which the true Philosophy depends, of which, if any one be loose, or weak, the whole chain is in danger of being dissolv'd; it is to begin with the Hands and Eyes, and to proceed on through the Memory, to be continued by the Reason; nor is it to stop there, but to come about to the Hands and Eyes again, and so, by a continual passage round from one Faculty to

another.[129]

As a scientist studying the new technology of the microscope, Hooke unsurprisingly pays special attention to the hands and eyes in imagining the loss of sense, but it is notable that he sees the cycle as beginning with weakness of both the hands *and* eyes. For Hooke, as for Samson, a simultaneity of weakness occasions the rest of the cycle of torment; thus, specialized human ability (a scientist working on microscopes and a formerly more-than-able-bodied man) that suffers the loss of its most relevant abilit(ies) exerts further debilitating force on the mind.

For Samson, the mutually inextricable experiences of weakness and blindness occasion and maintain his imprisonment. The senses also maintain an intersubjective relationship between the self and the outside environment. When parts of this relationship are compromised, mental and physical torment mingle, further diffusing any localized experiences of Samson's pain and disabilities. Samson notes this commixture when he complains that torment (which, interestingly, is gendered as male, while blindness is female), not satisfied with afflicting his body, interpolates itself into his mind, a process he describes long-windedly:

O that torment should not be confin'd
To the bodies wounds and sores
With maladies innumerable
In heart, head, brest, and reins;
But must secret passage find

[129] Hooke, Robert. *Micrographia, or, Some physiological descriptions of minute bodies made by magnifying glasses.* London: Jo. Martyn and Ja. Allestry, 1665. *Early English Books Online,* page unnumbered.

To th' inmost mind,

There exercise all his fierce accidents,

And on her purest spirits prey,

As on entrails, joints, and limbs,

With answerable pains, but more intense,

Though void of corporal sense. (606-616)

Samson insists that his experience of this suffering is "void of corporeal sense," which suggests an absence of sensation analogous to his eyes no longer being present. However, he emphasizes the "answerable pains, but more intense" that it entails, arguing that he quite literally feels it as pain, despite the fact that this pain cannot be pinpointed to physical woes involving "entrails, joints, and limbs." Unlike sight, torment is not confined to any specific part of the body, let alone restricted to the eyes, which would seem its ostensible target after Samson's eyes have been put out. Instead, Samson's experience of torment as having found "secret passage" to his "inmost mind" paints torment as parasitic, aggressive and invasive. Its entry is possible because of a space between corporeal and incorporeal spaces for torment to travel.

Two further observations of the commixture of Samson's corporeal and incorporeal torment are offered by the Chorus and Samson's father Manoa. In the Chorus's observation, Samson has become the "Dungeon" of his self, and his soul "in real darkness of the body dwells" (156-57). Additionally, they suggest that incorporeal vision falls short because of its inability to do the same thing as corporeal vision: "inward light alas / Puts forth no visual beam" (165-66). A theory of vision stating that sight worked because of a beam that extended outward from the eye was common in the early

modern blazon tradition. Samson highlights the failure of "inward light" to give off a "visual beam," thereby comparing divine sight (or other "insight") to literal sense-perception. This comparison problematizes critical accounts of Samson's "inward eyes" as a kind of substitution for vision—a "visual beam" cannot extend without the eyes, which suggests that the experience of vision itself cannot be projected onto spiritual experiences in the play.[130]

The body's interior machinations, while not exactly analogous to spiritual insights in *Samson Agonistes*, nevertheless forge a uniquely miserable hybrid of torment that is both physical and mental. Voicing a similar observation to that of the Chorus, Manoa notes that corporeal and incorporeal affliction distort Samson's ability to think clearly and reasonably. Responding earlier to Samson's sudden outpouring of sentiments expressing his need and desire to die, Manoa warns against internalizing information that seems to issue from internal imbalances: "Believe not these suggestions, which proceed / From anguish of the mind and humours black / That mingle with thy fancy" (599-601). Samson's fancy (his imagination) is imagined as a mutable substance, with which insidious melancholic humours "mingle," resulting in a quasi-material notion of imagination and "suggestion" itself. In the absence of literal vision, his mind seizes on other material stimuli to perceive and shape into (at least rhetorically) perceptible things. Drew Daniel notes that, for Samson, "Humours black" refer to "thick black juices from overheated blood… producing vapors that cloud Samson's mind."[131] Daniel notes that

[130] For critical accounts that cover the idea of divine or psychological inspiration as inward sight, Gorman, Lieb, and Radzinowicz, Mary Ann. *Towards Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
[131] Daniel, Drew. *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 205.

melancholy, masterfully showing up in Samson's self-presentation, suggests an intimate knowledge of Galenic humoral theory, and therefore a rhetorical self-consciousness on Milton's part.[132] In the remarks made by others (such as the Chorus), references to the physiology of torment and the psychology of wounds bolster the importance of "the sense that the mental and the physical are to be understood as intimately bound together in mutually causal reciprocity."[133] (Daniel 207).

The reciprocity binding corporeal and incorporeal movements and senses, while staging some challenges for unraveling the "real" perceptual information tangled up with that issuing from melancholy and "anguish of the mind," nevertheless suggests that intelligibility does not always rely on sensory ability. Rather, Samson's blindness and loss of strength throw into sharp relief, both for himself and for readers, the complexities of relationships between the limits of the senses, divine presence, vision, and visibility.[134] Scholars reading Samson—a blind protagonist crafted by a blind author who would not have been able to "read" as such—must resist an ableist assumption within arguments for "reading" in the play as a way to account for history and grapple with Milton's interpretation of the role of divine will in Samson's final act.[135] Even Samson's "rousing motions" are described as something he *feels*, and not as something either legible or

[132] Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage*, 204.
[133] Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage*, 207.
[134] See Neelakanta, Kezar, and Radzinowicz. Neelakanta and Kezar focus on blindness in *Samson Agonistes* as theatrically implicating and problematizing kinds of spectatorship. Radzinowicz's argument about blindness, while assuming that vision hinges on faith (an assumption that readers literally cannot prove since blinding occurs before the play begins), nevertheless offers a nuanced reading of the tensions between internal and external intelligibility of divine will.
[135] While discussions of the intelligibility of sensory information and different kinds of reading are sprinkled throughout much of the scholarship on Samson, I am thinking specifically of any arguments that position the reader, Samson, and Milton as participating in an economy of interpretation, one that can reliably account for history through reading or see it as "inscribed" in an unproblematically intelligible way. See Netzley and Shohet. For a few important exceptions, see Lieb, "Our Living Dread," and Fish, "Spectacle and Evidence." Fish, especially, treats the act, as well as the product, of "reading" as inherently resistant to ontological and spiritual fixity.

illegible (1382). Here and elsewhere, sense perception (including its ambiguous forms)—not acts of reading—defines the contours of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the play. *Samson*'s treatment of intersubjectivity comprises a key part of the next part of this chapter, in which I consider the positive correlation between Samson's lack of vision and his lack of social agency (due to his sense of shame), as well as the larger effects of these factors on his position in the play's social world.

II. The sociality of shame

Tracing the significance of Samson's meditation on sight and the interesting forms it takes help us recognize his complexity as a character Milton wrote as more than an attempt to repossess the sense of sight for himself. Attending to the strange paradigm for the sense of sight that emerges from Samson's inner torment also reveals that the dispossession of sight is central to Samson's misery. This is because loss of vision in turn leaves him vulnerable to the eyes and judgment of others. His sensory deprivation leads to an increased sense of the objectifying experience of being perceived by others after his downfall, and he frames his shame and misery in relation to his loss of sight. Samson openly claims that blindness is worse than all of the other aspects of his enslaved condition:

> O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
> Blind among enemies, O worse then chains,
> Dungeon, or beggery, or decrepit age! (67-69)

The key phrase here is "Blind among enemies." In his state of blindness, Samson remains as helpless before the Philistines as he did when they initially seized him, while he was

unconscious. Samson addresses the sense of sight directly, fixating on the irreversibility of losing his eyes at the hands of enemies. To Samson, blindness is another enemy: both the first and the ultimate punishment for his wanton overindulgence of Dalila's whims, it amplifies his awareness of surrounding public scrutiny.

In *Samson Agonistes*, the spectacle of Samson's body in slavery suggests he is the center of attention, but his own blindness leaves him unable to participate in this social economy of perception. Additionally, his loss of vision restricts him from knowing when he is the target of another's gaze. It also prevents him from being able to see the gaze of those who shame him, which counterintuitively seems to intensify the shame itself: if we follow affect theorist Silvan Tomkins' assertion that shame is in the main a reflexive of the shamed/ashamed subject turning upon himself, not being able to see the shaming gazes of others in fact could increase the cycle of internal self-shaming. Public scrutiny profoundly increases Samson's shame, and shame as an affect is intrinsically social: it involves an enhanced sense of scrutiny by those around the subject at the same time as it makes the subject believe that he or she is unfit for social life. Thus, shame situates the individual both within and outside of society. Despite its status as the "most reflexive" of affects, shame does not perforce trap the individual in his or her own ego; on the contrary, it can pave the way to a broader awareness of and engagement with the world and others.[136] In his study of shame in early modern England, Ewan Fernie centrally argues that shame "purifies our bad consciousness, offering salvation from the tyranny and prison of the self. It opens a door, pointing the way to spiritual health and realization

[136] Tomkins, Silvan. *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, Duke University Press, 1995, 136.

of the world beyond egoism."[137] Tomkins, similarly, views shame as extending beyond self-enclosure: "The vicarious experience of shame, together with the vicarious experience of distress, is at once a measure of civilization and a condition of civilization. Shame enlarges the spectrum of objects outside of himself which can engage man and concern him."[138] *Samson* represents shame and distress as affective states that can be felt vicariously through Samson by the Chorus and his father Manoa. As such, an examination of the play's representation of shame can also reveal its investments in the elements that make up a (dys)functional society. Further, it can help literary historians theorize and redistribute the effects of shame as a complex negotiation with the very realm of the social.

In what follows, I examine *Samson Agonistes*' representation of the relationship between sensory deprivation and sociality. I want to suggest that the play advances a positive correlation between sensory stimuli (in this case, the ability to perceive) and social agency. Samson's dispossessed sight, in turn, is associated with his profound sense of shame among other people. His shame, then, prevents him from taking rhetorical control of his own self-representation in conversations with the Chorus, Manoa, and Dalila. As a result, Samson is described, characterized, and objectified by others leading up to the point in the play when he destroys the temple. My aim is to examine the representation of shame and sociality in the play, focusing on the disconnect between Samson and his peers. My goal is to examine the play's representation of sociality beyond providing a new reading of Samson as hero or circumscribing the role of nationhood within a model of sociality and vice versa. Consequently, I focus on the

[137] Fernie, Ewan. *Shame in Shakespeare*. New York: Routledge, 2002, 8.
[138] Tomkins, *Shame and its Sisters*, 162.

descriptions Samson and others give of himself in enslavement, rather than the spectacle with which Samson ends his life and those of many of his enemies. *Samson Agonistes*' depiction of sensory loss links negative perceptual ability to negative social agency. Lacking sight, Samson is rendered a spectacle of defeat, and his inability to view himself or others through his own eyes forces him into a position of shame before his peers.

Sensory impairment in the form of blindness, especially the dispossession Samson experiences at the hands of the Philistines, produces a model of sociality that profoundly separates individual and community. Eugene Johnson argues that, in Samson, Milton "rejects the optimism that informs the relation between individual citizen and national community in *Areopagitica*."[139] Instead, the bleak outlook Samson and the Danite Chorus share "reinforce each other. Unlike the mutual enabling between citizen and nation in *Areopagitica*, Samson and the Danites mutually disable each other's hope for redemption."[140] The Chorus is indeed unhelpful in improving Samson's psychological state: as discussed at the opening of this chapter, they immediately draw attention to Samson's "diffused" condition, publicly emphasizing his obvious distress while he seeks peace and quiet: "Retiring from the popular noise, I seek / This unfrequented place to find some ease" (16-17). The "popular noise" in this case is a source of overstimulation to him even in his state of sensory loss. Overwhelm here is especially strong given that the majority of the noise is a reminder of the Philistines' celebration of a pagan holiday, and that much of it is also negative attention and jeering directed at Samson. But overstimulation for Samson is social as well as perceptual: "popular" in the period relates

[139] Johnson, Eugene. "The Failed Jeremiad in *Samson Agonistes*." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1400-1800* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 179-194, 179.

[140] Johnson "The Failed Jeremiad," 187.

to noise derived from the crowd, masses, or ordinary people. Samson's choice of language suggests his excessive public visibility triggers a sense of feeling restricted or trapped among others. Thus, he consciously separates himself from the sounds of the throng in order to relieve his body, however temporarily.

Along the same lines, Samson's self-conscious social separation extends to and reduces the interpretive options available to readers. Brendan Quigley characterizes Samson as a distant character to the reader as well: "as hero Samson is silent and separate, and so, strictly speaking, unknowable."[141] (530). Samson indeed remains distant and mysterious to readers, particularly at the moment when he describes the enigmatic "rousing motions" he feels prior to regaining his strength destroying his enemies' temple. But there are moments in which Samson shares with us his introspection about himself in a material and existential sense. In particular, Samson's peculiar reflections on the functions and broader ontological status of eyesight give us rare insight into his conception of the relationship between sensation and the self. They also represent his attempt to grapple with the social reality of blindness that leaves him to be a spectacle of shame before his peers and enemies and that torments him "To th' inmost mind" (611). As Eleanor Brown has observed, Samson is "a psychological character represented as fully in touch with his own 'inmost mind' and able to express the intensity of his traumatic pain."[142]

Shame stands out as the primary modality of Samson's experience of restricted social agency. In the social landscape of *Samson Agonistes*, those who still have the gift

[141] Quigley, Brendan. "The Distant Hero of *Samson Agonistes*." *ELH* 72, no. 3 (2005): 529-551, 530.

[142] Brown, Eleanor. *Milton's Blindness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1934, 95.

of sight surround Samson and either join him in bemoaning his condition or exacerbate his sense of torment. For Samson, shame stems both from his acquiescence to Dalila's demands to understand the source of his strength and from his enslavement and degradation at the hands of the Philistines. When he hears footsteps, he expects his enemies, who "come to stare / At my affliction, and perhaps to insult, / Thir daily practice to afflict me more" (112-114). Samson's complaint emphasizes the humiliating nature of being the object of his enemies' gaze. If shame is an attack on the self, then the Philistines' "daily practice" of gawking and hurling insults intensifies Samson's already miserable experience of blindness and captivity. In 1640, Richard Baker, using the Biblical Samson as an example, argues that the experience of serving as an object of mockery for one's enemies constitutes a punishment worse than bodily harm: "It troubled not Samson so much, to have his eyes put out, as to bee brought out before his enemies, to be the laughing-stock for them to rejoyce at."[143] Baker's emphasis on the inherently punitive effects of shame offers up the Samson story as a key example of the connection between religious transgression and social shame, two of the largest fears of a culture that upheld class hierarchies as well as religious piety.

Critics have long been sensitive to the play's emphasis on shame as a major form of Samson's torment. Framing Samson's distress in the context of visual perception, Linda Gregerson writes that "Samson's keenest sense of misery stems from having become the 'gaze' of his enemies, an object of scorn."[144] Laura Lunger Knoppers, who examines *Samson Agonistes* in the context of the oppositional discourses of treason and

[143] Baker, Richard, Sir, 1568-1645. *Meditations and Disquisitions, upon the Seven Consolatorie Psalmes of David Namely, the 23. the 27. the 30. the 34. the 84. the 103. the 116.* London: I. Dawson for F. Eglesfield, 1640. *Early English Books Online*, 67.
[144] Gregerson, Linda. "Milton and the Tragedy of Nations." *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (2014): 672-687, 680.

martyrdom surrounding the execution of the regicides in 1660, comments on the psychological effects of the constant display of Samson's body in captivity. "Samson is not so much suffering from physical pain as he is shamed by his constant visibility, branded with infamy, 'the scorn and gaze' of his Philistine foes."[145] Describing Samson's body as "the public sign of Philistine triumph and power," Knoppers demonstrates the effects blindness and captivity have on Samson: no longer able to exercise agency over his own body or control the way it is displayed, Samson becomes an icon of humiliation to the Israelites.

Samson's loss of communication and refuge is due to the forfeiture of his relationship with God, which he links to sight:

> But now, [God] hath cast me off as never known,
> Left me all helpless with th' irreparable loss
> Of sight, reserv'd alive to be repeated
> The subject of thir cruelty, or scorn. (641, 644–46)

God's abandonment and the permanent state of blindness are doubly isolating, and so is Samson's new daily social landscape. His speech emphasizes the recursive nature of his enemies' harassment of him. His new identity is that of "the subject of [the Philistines'] cruelty, or scorn," not as a chosen favorite of God endowed with extraordinary abilities. As Vanita Neelakanta points out, "Milton's closet drama forges an intrinsic connection between the hero's loss of sight and divine withdrawal. God dismisses Samson "as never known." He turns a blind eye to his hero, thereby plunging Samson into literal

[145] Knoppers, Laura Lunger. "'This So Horrid Spectacle': *Samson Agonistes* and the Execution of the Regicides." *ELR* 20, no. 3 (1990): 487-504, 496.

darkness."[146] In the spiritual or metaphysical sense, the separation from God is figured as an absence of light. Samson's plight aligns both external and internal blindness with social isolation and spiritual inertia, and recognizes that his blindness is a direct result of his transgressions against God and his nation.

The link between eyesight and sin is well-described in contemporary writings. In 1621, one writer, Archibald Simson, asserts the primacy of blindness as a punishment for Samson's preoccupation with worldly objects and pleasures:

> Now the first punishment which the Lord layeth on Samson, is BLINDNES…Samsons eyes were full of vncleannes, & they were pulled out of his head. Our eyes are apointed for better vses, to wit, that we may beholde Gods workes, and glorifie him therein. But when they are instruments of wantonnesse, & through which windowes we send foorth the vncleane lusts of a polluted heart, and open them to admit & giue entry to wicked alluremente of others; then no doubt God may justlie punish those members which sinned.

Simson likens the eyes to "windows," comparing them to openings through which people both can emit the unwholesome desires of their flesh and are able to welcome temptations into their souls. His text echoes early modern beliefs that the eyes were highest on the hierarchy of the senses both in terms of their importance and their use. Simson goes further to include shame in his list of Samson's punishments:

> Now Samsons fourth punishment is OPEN SHAME: wherein wee may obserue the just recompense of Samson in euery thing: his lustfull eyes are pulled out: the

[146] Neelakanta, Vanita. "*Theatrum Mundi* and Milton's Theater of the Blind in *Samson Agonistes*." *Journal for Early Modern Cutlural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 30-58, 33.

abuse of his liberty is turned to bonds: his slauery to sinne, is turned to the slauery of his flesh: & now last, his dishonour to God, turneth to his open shame.[147]

Here, the punishment of shame is figured as a transformation of dishonor and includes the act of being blinded in a violent and visually gruesome way. The appearance of Samson's eyes, which he himself characterizes as "dark orbs," is otherwise not particularly well-described in Milton's text, but most likely would enhance Samson's humiliation and serve as a visual reminder of their overpowering of him after the revelation of his secret to Dalila (591). Timothy J. Burbery contends that the play suggests Samson's eyes actually remain intact; for instance, he cites passages in which both Manoa and the Danites "refer to the possible restoration of [Samson's] eyesight," implying that the eyes "are whole and merely in need of reactivation."[148] However, Samson calls his blindness "irreparable" and hyper-fixates on the functions and possibilities of eyesight, which implies that his eyes are visibly ruined and his blindness irreversible (644). The permanence of blindness registers as both a direct punishment for Samson's sin and as a reminder of his spiritual and social rejection.

What about the opposite possibility? In what ways, we might ask, are sight and social agency mutually informative? One possibility lies in the belief, common in the early modern period, that sight and spiritual discernment are related. Samson's failure to discern what information he should reveal to Dalila is punished by a loss of the instruments of his discernment. In a 1657 sermon, Thomas Jackson contrasts the "manly"

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[147] Simson, Archibald, 1564-1628. *Samsons Seaven Lockes of Haire Allegorically Expounded, and Compared to the Seauen Spirituall Vertues, Whereby we are Able to Ouercome our Spirituall Philistims.* St. Andrews: Edward Raban, 1621. *Early English Books Online*, 56-57.
[148] Burbery, Timothy J. "The Representation of Samson's Eyes in *Samson Agonistes*." *English Language Notes* 35, no. 2 (1997) 27-32, 28.

fear of shame with the "womanish" fear of "popular disgrace," using Samson and Dalila as an example:

> And the expelling of this masculine by this womanish fear of disgrace or reproach, *is as the putting out of the eyes of discretion, whereby we discern good from evil*. So that Satan leads them up and down at his pleasure as the Philistines did Samson after he had lost his bodily eyes by the cutting off his hair. (3840; emphasis added)

Jackson asserts that the betrayal of the "masculine" fear of shame is metaphorically equivalent to having one's eyes put out. Much in tune with Samson's insistence on rendering femininity parallel with sabotage, he associates women with reactionary, shallow, and reckless acquiescence to the lures of the moment. In his formulation, the fear of shame can perhaps be likened to an awareness of the long-term effects and consequences of sin, whereas the fear of worldly reproach evinces a desire to avoid pain or criticism in the short-term scheme of things. Milton himself describes Samson's punishment in similar terms in his *Reason of Church Government* (1641):

> I cannot better liken the state and person of a King then to that mighty Nazarite Samson…who [was] disciplin'd from his birth in the precepts and the practice of Temperance and Sobriety…But laying down his head…those Philistims put out the fair, and farre-sighted eyes of his natural discerning.

Like a king, Samson inherently possesses great power, and we have all heard that with great power comes great responsibility.

But even putting Peter Parker's most cherished maxim aside, Milton at the very least here merges discernment both with dignity and perceptive ability, suggesting that

without sufficient exercise of responsibility, even the greatest powers can be taken away from those who do not practice constant vigilance. Samson's own meta-interrogation, "But what is strength without a double share / Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome, / Proudly secure, yet liable to fall" (53-55), in fact calls for a greater measure of responsibility in order to temper a degree of strength as powerful as his. The word "secure" here retains its Latin sense, and in the period was often used negatively to indicate one who is "overconfident; careless; complacent" (*OED*, "secure, *adj*., *adv*., and *n*." A.1.a). Samson's strength, in other words, got too big for its britches. As a result, he yearns for things to be the opposite. Samson's argument likens his possession of strength to eyesight by insisting that discernment must accompany this ability, or else

> Immeasurable strength they might behold
> In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;
> This with the other should, at least, have pair'd,
> These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse. (206-209)

Strength, like sight, is a bodily capability lost through removal of a physical part. In Samson's view, if he had never revealed strength as literally localized to his hair, that localization itself would not have been such a downfall. At one point, Samson describes his unearthly strength to another character as "diffus'd / No less through all my sinews, joints and bones, / Than thine" (1140-1143). But even though he was undoubtedly able to access strength in every part of his body, Samson's other references to the source of his strength seem intentionally vague. Not only does everyone already know that Samson's hair was the cause of his strength, but also he himself believes regaining his strength is impossible. Yet, he still refuses to name his hair as its origin: "Was it not weakness also

to make known / For importunity, that is for naught, / *Wherein* consisted all thy strength and safety?" (778-780, emphasis added). Samson rhetorically dislocates strength with only ancillary references to its source of power in his hair while rehearsing his regret over revealing the source of his strength.

Samson views his strength as (dis)located in a way that resembles sight, and actively resists thematization of hair as his source of strength through his rhetorically oblique framing of his strength's source. In one such statement, he narrates his regret of his decision to reveal the site of his secret strength "weakly to a woman" (50): "This high gift of strength committed to me, / In what part lodged, how easily bereft me" (47-48). When describing Dalila's feminine guiles, he refers to strength only in an oblique way: "she assayed… to win from me / My capital secret, in what part my strength / Lay stored, in what part summed, that she might know" (392-95). Samson revisits the scene of this past conversation, before his failure. It is not surprising that Samson rhetorically inhabits his regret by rehearsing the moments of interrogation before he gave into it. Additionally, readers familiar with the story all know that Samson's strength hinges on the preservation of the length of his hair (and Manoa reinforces the idea that the return of his hair would equal that of his strength—"why else this strength / Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?" (586-87)). However, why should Samson not recall his strength by explicitly naming his hair when recalling the moment he revealed it as the source? In describing the nature of his strength, Samson evades identification of it in a specific body part even though, for him, strength resides in his hair as literally as sight in the eye's "tender ball" (94). He seems to find a kind of empowerment, albeit imagined, in these moments of resisting identification of the source. Far from the freedom—both bodily and emotional—

that he would have gained by keeping this information from Dalila, Samson nevertheless returns to imagining the dislocation of strength that he constructs as literally located in his hair.

This detail contributes to the complex subjectivity Milton represents in Samson as a disabled character because it suggests that Milton cares to some degree about representing the experience of disability itself rather than choosing exposition of disability for the sake of moving on with the narrative's "main event." That is, Samson's meditations on the structure of his strength and its loss do not function primarily to build up anticipation for the destruction of the temple, but rather stand on their own as a key focus of characterization and philosophical concerns within the play. Even with no way of knowing what Samson's experience of his strength feels like, Milton chooses to represent his protagonist's view of strength as influenced by blindness, a disability whose consequences reach further here than just restricting sight. In choosing to represent Samson's final demonstration of strength offstage, Milton echoes Greek tragic conventions that do not represent violence onstage, but he also gives more representational space to Samson's experience of the "loss" of his strength than to his exercise of it at the end.

Samson's revenge may clearly demonstrate a reclamation of his strength, but it also complicates the play's social dynamics of shame and visual perception. The primary social effect of shame in *Samson Agonistes* is to isolate Samson (the one experiencing shame) in a perceptual bubble, where perceptual exchange (and thereby social agency) functions in a one-way model. That is, the Philistines and other characters are free to look at Samson while he is unable to look back. Additionally, in the timeline of Milton's play,

Samson is unable to control or escape the constant noise of the Philistines' libations, and, as we have seen in the opening lines, his very first course of action is to seek out a quiet place that might provide some respite for his mind. Mintz underlines the psychological effects of this auditory overstimulation:

> To be bombarded with unmediated sound, condemned to hear too much—unable to claim the power to turn off someone else's words, unable to ignore or "mishear" others—thus seems one of the most egregious signs of Samson's humiliation. Hearing becomes a kind of penalty, continually reminding Samson of his susceptibility to the seductions of sound, and his loss of unyielding self-enclosure.[149]

Even if Samson were able to look back at the Philistines, he would not be able to project shameful feelings out to his jeering audience, for, as Tomkins notes in his work on the feeling of "shame-humiliation," shame comes from within and involves a recursive back-and-forth between the self as perceiver and perceived:

> In contrast to all other affects, shame is an experience of the self by the self. At the moment when the self is ashamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self. Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and the object of shame is lost.[150]

Tomkins highlights the reflexivity of shame to emphasize the unidirectionality of self-consciousness; while it can be exacerbated by outside forces (in particular the experience of being highly visible to others), shame traps the individual by overwhelming them and also rendering them unable to exert social influence (which might distract from this

[149] Mintz, "Dalila's Touch," 196.
[150] Tomkins, *Shame and its Sisters*, 136.

overwhelm) over others. In this model, multiple modes and avenues of communication are foreclosed.

Samson's recovery of his strength—and the catastrophic act of destruction that follows it—is often associated with a positive social outcome in the sense that Samson is finally getting revenge over the Philistines for putting out his eyes and publicly debasing him. For their part, early modern mentions of the Samson story tend to describe the destruction of the temple in positive terms, highlighting Samson's ability to overcome his enemies and score a win for the Israelites. These texts usually commend two things: Samson's exceptional strength and the use of it against the Philistines (often used to symbolize overcoming sin and realigning with God or to serve as a sign of God's deliverance of the ones he has chosen). As Derek Wood has noted, 5 out of the 6 mentions of revenge in *Samson Agonistes* take place in the last 300 lines of the play. This makes sense because Samson does regain his strength at the end of the play due to mysterious "rouzing motions," but we must be careful not to equate this with positive social agency, since he interprets the rush of strength as an opportunity to commit an act of terrorism. The status of the destruction of the temple as a terrorist act has been well-documented in scholarship on the play post-9/11. Hence, my goal is not to debate whether the destruction of the temple is terroristic or ultimately devastating—it is both. Rather, I want to explore the social possibilities of revenge when it is described as a chance to repay the loss of one's eyesight. In this way, *Samson Agonistes* provides a striking example of an early modern text that equates the robbing of someone's perceptive ability with the need for revenge, which is inherently social. It should be noted, however, that revenge doesn't necessarily amount to social agency. If someone is

in a position to revenge, then they have already been wronged/victimized in the first place, which suggests that others have exerted power or sovereignty over them.

The destruction of the Philistines' temple may gain for Samson the revenge he desires; however, it in no way reverses the social dynamic (primarily enslavement) that denies him dignity and self-enclosure. Instead, Samson's revenge places him firmly in the ranks of those tragic characters Harry Levin has dubbed "overreachers"—like Marlowe's Tamburlaine or Barabas, his revenge far exceeds the original act of wrongdoing. Revenge is essential to the Samson story: the biblical account in Judges 16:28 makes this clear: "Then Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, I pray thee, think upon me: O God, I beseech thee, strengthen me at this time only, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." The biblical account emphasizes the gouging out of Samson's eyes as his primary motive for violence. In the 1667 first edition of *Paradise Lost*, the poet Andrew Marvell highlights both Samson's intent to revenge and the overreaching nature of this revenge: "(So Sampson groped the Temple's post in spite) / The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight." (1-10). Marvell's words, "groped" and "o'erwhelming," suggest a broader awareness in the period of the fact that Samson's revenge is neither measured nor at all discerning. Not only does Samson fail to regain his vision by destroying the temple, but he also fails to temper the excess of his revenge, just as he failed to temper the other strong and personally motivated desires that led him here. *Samson Agonistes*' own comments on revenge underline its potential to make things right, and reject Samson's method as excessive: "O lastly over-strong against thyself! / A dreadful way thou took'st to thy revenge" (1590-91). Revenge fails to reestablish the lost boundary between the self as subject and object that is elemental to Samson's shame. It

also fails to excise Samson from his position in the social order as a "burdenous drone; to visitants a gaze, / Or pitied object" (567-68). Instead, it exacts a final attack on the self, resulting in utter oblivion and devastation of social life itself.

Nevertheless, in the final scenes of the play, the perceptual bubble is burst and reversed. Samson's final destruction of the temple and the attendant Philistines, like many other extreme instances of violence on the early modern stage, would take place off-screen. In this staging paradigm, the audience takes Samson's place in the non-sight model. Like Samson, we are now both unable to witness the main action of the play and unable to escape its accompanying noise. The offstage violence would involve dramatically loud and horrifying screams, as Manoa's jolt of surprise plainly tells us: "I know your friendly minds and—O what noise! / Mercy of Heav'n! what hideous noise was that? / Horribly loud, unlike the former shout" (1508-1510). Here, Manoa takes up the task of informing the audience of the sudden shift in the auditory environment and characterizes it as "hideous." In this moment, a model of sociality that has been two-way becomes one-way. Up to this point, the audience has been able to bear witness to all of the play's dialogue and actions, and is complicit in objectifying Samson as the agent of tragic blindness. Suddenly, we find ourselves in Samson's position, visually deprived of the sight that would horrify us, yet unable to dodge the sounds of violent destruction that signal the tragic resolution we have been watching out for all along.

Where previously the Philistines assault Samson's sense of hearing with the din of their drunken celebrations, Samson asserts that the inability to escape their gazes and abuses while he himself is blind results in feeling debased beyond status of humanity: "Inferior to the vilest now become / Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me, / They

creep, yet see; I dark in light expos'd" (73-75). Likening his enemies to the lowest of low creatures, Samson argues that his inability to see like "the vilest here" is what disgraces him most. Metaphorical and perceptual debasement take similar forms here, as Samson compares his enemies to "worms," animals that are technically blind but able to navigate just fine despite their blindness. Edward Topsell's well-known treatise on animals, *The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents*, includes at its end a section named "The Theatre of Insects," whose remarks on worms are far from flattering. Worms, according to Topsell, "breed of the slime of the earth, taking their first being from putrefaction." More importantly, they "lack eyes and eye-sight, as all sorts of Worms do."[151] If, as it seems, early moderns were generally aware that worms do not see in the same way as us, why does Samson highlight the Philistines' eyesight ability by comparing them to worms? His claims that they "creep, yet see" emphasize the insidious and subterranean nature of their method of capturing him, and possibly also describes their newfound courage to approach and mock him in his blinded and weakened state.

Samson's transformation from free superhuman Nazarite to disabled and enslaved at the hands of the Philistines positions him in what Susanna Mintz calls "an intersubjective space fraught with anxiety about the possibility of misunderstanding" (176). This is one of the reasons that Dalila's presence in the play actually disturbs the naturalized social boundary between Samson and the members of his tribe. Unlike the Chorus and Manoa, who express disbelief during their in-person encounters with

[151] Topsell, Edward. *The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents Describing at Large their True and Lively Figure, their several Names, Conditions, Kinds, Virtues ... Countries of their Breed, their Love and Hatred to Mankind; Whereunto is Now Added, the Theater of Insects, Or, Lesser Living Creatures.* London: E. Cotes for G. Sawbridge, 1658. *Early English Books Online*, 811.

Samson, Dalila actually approaches Samson free of apprehensiveness and doubt. Mintz describes Dalila's effect on the play's social dynamic as soothing and supportive. Dalila creates "a new intersubjective space in which they might assuage the damage of the past" and offers Samson "the mutual regard of recognition…"[152] Mintz's focus on the sociality of recognition can intersect well with an examination of the part where Samson says God "cast him off as never known"—the focus on levels of acquaintance feels important here. After all, our introduction to the Chorus involves their disbelief and skepticism that the Samson of the play is even the same person they had known before; they question the audience rhetorically: "can this be he?" (124). Mintz points out the connection between the experience of disability and interpersonal encounters, "every interpersonal exchange necessarily entails the possibility of a failure of recognition," noting that the disabled figure is "stigmatized (or even idealized) as radically other."[153]

Given Dalila's questioning of where *strength* is located (a process Samson describes in disturbingly gendered ways), it seems important to consider how her understanding of the senses operates alongside Samson's, and what this understanding reveals about the representation of Samson as a blind character. Dalila believes that blindness, while irreversible, ought not occasion Samson's permanent resentment of her. Rather, she suggests that he can still enjoy life with her help:

> Afford my place to show what recompense
> Towards thee I intend for what I have misdone,
> Misguided; only what remains past cure
> Bear not too sensibly, nor still insist

[152] Mintz, "Dalila's Touch," 178-179.
[153] Mintz, "Dalila's Touch," 176.

To afflict thyself in vain: though sight be lost,

Life yet hath many solaces, enjoyed

Where other senses want not their delights. (913-916)

To feel something "sensibly" means to feel it intensely, which fits well in the play's focus on suffering more broadly. However, what interests me most is the more literal register of "sensible" in this speech. Samson is utterly blind; his eyes are gone. Yet Dalila advises Samson not to "bear not too sensibly" his loss of sight, suggesting that he can choose not to fixate on one sense, instead only inhabiting the ones that remain intact. It is difficult to imagine why one should be compelled to bear the emotional and physiological pain regarding the loss of one's eyes without too much attention to the sensible pain and void of that loss, as well as to the affect that fills the void of that loss. For Samson, what to Dalila is borne "too sensibly" is to him a catalyst for existential crisis, in which the loss of one sense predicates his anxieties about the loss, failure to locate, or trust his other senses, among which he places his divinely-ordained strength. The success of Dalila's request depends on Samson sharing the same views on what "remains past cure," which is his eyesight. In Dalila's gesture toward senses other than sight, she paints an optimistic picture, and one that readers may readily understand as physiologically available to Samson; other forms of perception still exist. In the grand scheme of the senses, she suggests, loss of eyesight only eliminates one-fifth of the picture, in which sight is the only perceptual mode that "want[s]" its corresponding "delights." If Samson would just seek sensory input elsewhere, he would be able to enjoy life again to the fullest of his (newly limited) potential. However misogynistically represented, Dalila's misrecognition of Samson's experience—in particular, her underestimation of the ontological structure

and affective weight of blindness for Samson—ultimately demonstrates a disjuncture between their characters' views of sense and embodied experience itself. This split further complicates Samson's disability and distances it from a singular idea of the "normal body"—one divorced from time, space, and social and cultural contingencies.

At the end of their introduction to *Narrative Prosthesis*, Mitchell and Snyder gesture toward more ethical relationships between literary texts and disabilities, which are carried out in "works that situate disability as a critical component of their narrative interests. Rather than signify disability as a symbol of cultural ruin, these works narrate the experience of disability as a social and lived phenomenon,"[154] I suggest that *Samson Agonistes* does precisely this work of interrogating the experience of disability in social and lived contexts. Future studies of this text, and of other representations of blindness and disability in Milton's work, have the potential to complicate the view that the dominant mode of disability in narrative is as prosthesis. Indeed, Mitchell and Snyder argue that "…future representational modes of disability may mine the archives for the identification of a more complex disability subjectivity, one that has been both historically bequeathed and directly tied to the material basis of disability experiences themselves. Thus, the future of disability begins with an informed turn to the past."[155] For scholars of Milton's work, and of early modern literature more broadly, the historicist work we do in our time period of study offers the potential to shape future discourses of the representations of disability and participate in an area that, at this moment, remains highly in flux.

[154] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 13.
[155] Ibid.

V:

Coda

After finishing this dissertation, I realized I have further ideas for ways that this research could be extended, as well as some other avenues it could take. Each idea flows from dynamics that were suggestive but not detailed within the chapter-level arguments. I have not formally pursued these specific directions in research yet. As such, the approaches I describe below are simply recommendations and are not meant to be exhaustive in any way.

First, I consider it important and interesting to extend one of the central research questions of the dissertation (how do sense perceptions influence and change social dynamics?) by complicating the primary way I have framed perception as social thus far. Social perception works in multiple directions and, while an individual experiences the presence (or absence) of another, they are, too, sensed by other people. One way to take this question further is to look back at *Samson Agonistes*' representation of the double bind of blindness and (public) captivity; what does it mean to feel and experience the gaze of others while not being able to return it? Assuming the person who can sense another is in that person's physical proximity, they too are being sensed, and individuals may have different feelings about being perceived. While I have analyzed some of the outcomes of shame as one response to feeling and knowing one is perceived, many other kinds of reactions are possible depending on the specific person and social situation.

Pride, flattery, guilt, and rebellion are a few other examples of states of being that often are accompanied by a feeling of being seen or noticed by another.

More attention to the multidirectionality of social perceptions could be followed by (or substituted with) additional research on physical space and definitions of its functions as a phenomenological tool to understand the way sensation and socially mutually inform one another. In the chapter on *Malta* and *Merchant,* I have a moderate amount of discussion of "social space," which is a loose concept I have related to olfaction but that could be more fully elaborated or reexamined in future research frameworks. The Herbert chapter is also focused on space in terms of confinement to the limited room of the devotional closet, which becomes even further contracted when God is perceived to distance himself from the devotional speaker. Additionally, Herbert seems to imagine this sense of contracted space as figuratively mirrored by the speaker's physical and mental deterioration. Finally, my dissertation has featured conceptual terms like "expansion" and "enclosure," which suggest but don't fully explain how I envision a phenomenologically informed discussion of space. Since the physical proximity of a person is required in various degrees (depending on technologies, communication capabilities, social convention, etc.) in order for there to be a social potential for sensation, spatial analysis can help extend the phenomenological work of sensory studies further into the world of social interactions.

Finally, research into early modern understandings of sensation and sociality could benefit from more uncovering of the implications of non-human agents as sensing subjects who also have their own kinds and structures of sociality. Originally, my plan for this dissertation included a longer coda on animal-human hybrid senses and scientific

"societies" in Margaret Cavendish's 1666 prose romance *The Blazing World*.I believe that further analysis of the constructions of sociality as they pertain to animal sensory faculties would help form a fuller picture of early modern understandings of sentient and intelligent engagement with the environment. It would also help extend my discussion thus far of not-quite-human devotional "creatures" in Herbert's poetry and to elaborate the way that early modern culture understands the social status of non-human and animal beings with regard to religion and science, which both offer frameworks relevant to early moderns for apprehending the natural world.

As stated above, these are simply a few ideas for the continuation and development of this dissertation's work. Other broad approaches could consider other early modern literary texts that allegorize the senses or bodily parts and compare these representations to those of, say, Thomas Tomkis's *Lingua* or Edmund Spenser's Castle of Alma in *The Fairie Queene*. It could also be fruitful to analyze other texts that represent an individual as being out of balance or unsettled by their social and physical environment. And lastly, one could discuss the effects of the two senses not discussed in this dissertation (touch and taste), focusing on instances of touch and taste as overwhelming or a way of registering deprivation, whether that deprivation is physical, social, spiritual, or something else. Readers are encouraged to view this project as a starting point for their own thoughts and contributions to studies of the body, perception, and social relationships in literary studies. Ultimately, it is my hope that readers will come to a deeper understanding of sense perception as a social force as well as a set of capabilities that allow us to continually negotiate our own knowledge of and feelings about our experiences of the world.

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